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Novel
7

The Saint's
Magic Power is
Omnipotent



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*Using local specialty
ingredients from
each region...*

*...we're holding a
food festival!*





*Making lots of
dishes with rice
for the grand
magus...*

*...who's now hooked
on the magic of rice!*

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The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent



WRITTEN BY
Yuka Tachibana

ILLUSTRATED BY
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Seven Seas Entertainment

Characters

*The Saint's Magic Power
is Omnipotent*

Sei



Sei

Sei Takanashi, an office lady who was summoned to another world to be the Saint. She's been healing people and purging monsters, and recently has been troubled by the fact that all over the place, people have begun to worship her. Enjoys cooking and making cosmetics.



Johan Valdec

The head researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. Keeps an eye on and takes care of Sei. Friends with Albert since childhood.



Yuri Drewes

Grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly. His only interest is in research related to magic and magical powers. Has taken a keen interest in Sei.



Jude

A researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora and in charge of teaching Sei. Caring and friendly. Frequently comes to snatch the food Sei makes.



Aira

Aira Misono, a high schooler who was summoned to another world like Sei. Studying magic at the Royal Magi Assembly.



Elizabeth Ashley

The daughter of a marquis whom Sei befriended at the library. Looks up to Sei.



Erhart Hawke

Magus of the Royal Magi Assembly and Albert's older brother. A man of few words who has common sense. Always being manipulated by Yuri.



Leonhardt

The leader of the mercenary company in Klausner's Domain. He takes a liking to Sei for her great skill as an alchemist.



Albert Hawke

Knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order. Known as the "Ice Knight" for his supposedly frigid demeanor, but toward Sei, he's...?



The moment she got home from working overtime at the office, Sei Takanashi, an office lady in her twenties, was abruptly summoned to another world. Although Sei was summoned to be the Saint, the crown prince of the kingdom exited the room with only Aira Misono, the cute high school girl who had been summoned with Sei, leaving Sei behind.

Sei had no notion of how to return to Japan, so she soon decided to begin working at the palace's Research Institute of Medicinal Flora.

Although Sei realized that she was indeed the Saint, she concealed the truth in order to live her life as an ordinary person. However, Sei displayed tremendous magical ability, astounding everyone with her skills in potion-making, cooking, and concocting cosmetics.

Starting from the day she used one of her high-grade HP potions to save Knight Commander Albert Hawke's life, Sei performed one miracle after another. In time, rumor in the palace began to suggest that Sei Takanashi was the true Saint.





Although she was summoned by the Royal Magi Assembly to be the Saint, Sei managed to avoid being outed for some time. She took up intensive magical training under the guidance of Grand Magus Yuri Drewes, and her days were busy yet fulfilling.

Perhaps as a result of her training, or perhaps by mere coincidence, Sei performed another miracle with her gold-colored magic, strengthening suspicions that she was the Saint. However, Crown Prince Kyle denounced those suspicions, stubbornly upholding Aira as the true Saint.

Nonetheless, on a monster-slaying expedition, Sei once and for all proved her Sainthood. When Knight Commander Albert Hawke was in danger, Sei called on her golden magic to instantly cleanse the black miasma producing the monsters.

As a result, Crown Prince Kyle was confined to his quarters for accusing Sei of being a false Saint. Furthermore, Aira, who had been isolated by Kyle once she arrived in the kingdom, was finally able to make friends at the academy, and with Sei. She, too, now strives for a peaceful life.





Due to the miraculous power of her golden magic, Sei was finally recognized as the true Saint. However, she still couldn't figure out how exactly to consistently call on her Saintly power.

Even so, Sei received a request to visit Klausner's Domain—the alchemist's holy land. She enjoyed the trip at first, where she became the apprentice of a master alchemist, befriended the captain of a mercenary company, and explored the possibilities of medicinal cooking.

Then, while working with her new teacher, Sei came across the memoirs of a previous Saint. Thanks to a hint in the memoirs, Sei finally figured out how to use the Saint's special powers—but the key to calling on them was so embarrassing that she couldn't tell anyone. She had to think about Knight Commander Hawke!

However, now that Sei could use the Saint's power, she could do what she had come to do: go into the forest with the knights and mercenaries, and slay the monsters within.





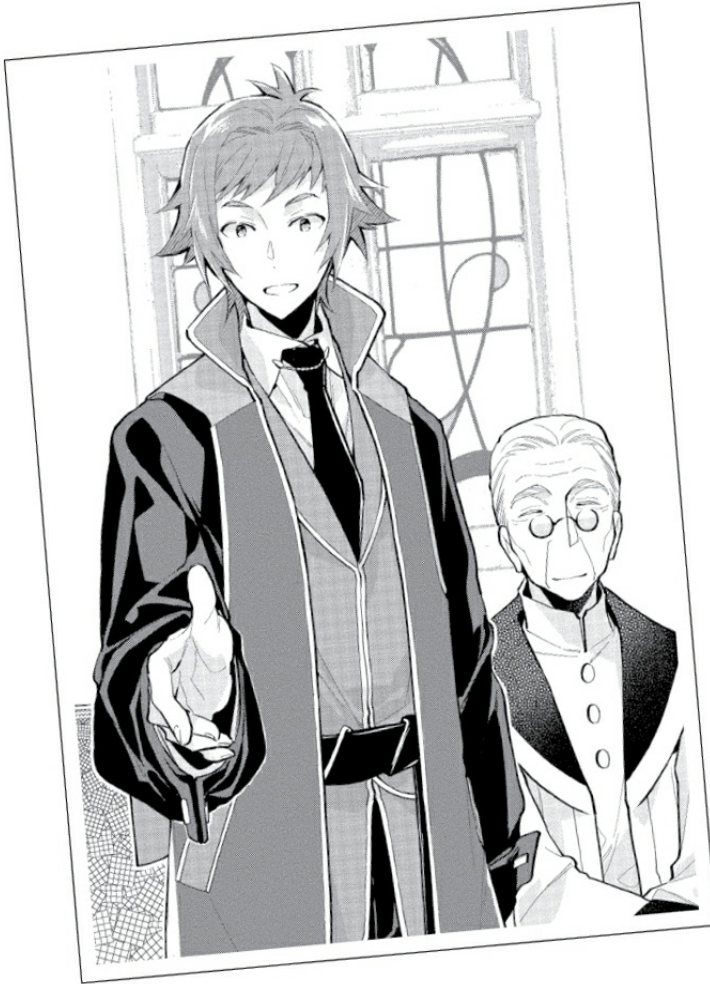
With the help of these powerful reinforcements, Sei successfully purified the forest and brought peace to Klausner's Domain. However, one thing still troubled Sei: the tragic state of the forest devastated by the slimes. In secret, Sei used the power of the Saint to miraculously revive the forest.

During the victory banquet, Sei and Aira helped with the cooking and grew closer with the mercenaries. However, with her Saintly mission now completed, it was time to leave. Though it pained Sei and company to say farewell to their new companions, they couldn't help feeling cheerful as they made their way back to the capital.

Now able to use the Saint's power at will, Sei headed into the forests of Klausner's Domain, where valuable herbs grew in abundance. Though she was protected by the knights and mercenaries, as they proceeded into the forest depths, they encountered slimes—monsters resistant to physical attacks!

They were soon surrounded. After a grueling fight, Sei and her companions managed to escape back to the castle. There, they discussed how to reach the forest's heart, as they lacked the magical firepower to defeat the slimes. Luckily, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes arrived, Aira in tow.





Sei returned to the capital from Klausner's Domain. In gratitude for her work there, she received rare herbs and seeds, which she used to develop new types of skin-care products. The recipes for Sei's products were incredibly popular across the kingdom, and they flew off the shelves the second they were put on the market. At her friends' suggestion, Sei finally decided to establish her own company. She opened a shop in the capital, run by Oscar and Franz. One day, when she was visiting it, she discovered that coffee existed in her new world!

Interested in what other imported products might be available, Sei started searching for Japanese food. She went to a port city known for trade, hoping that she might find something there. Before her search could begin, she ran across someone in need. The captain of a ship was searching for a mage to heal his injured crewmate. Sei helped him by giving him a potion that she had made, and she hit the jackpot: the foods this crew had brought from their country! Sei was delighted to finally be reunited with rice and miso, which she had sorely missed.





Sei was especially careful to avoid the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora whenever the prince visited it, but on one unlucky day, he accidentally happened upon her.

Through Sei's conversations with the prince, she learned that he was searching for a medicine that would aid his ailing mother. Using her knowledge from her life in Japan, Sei managed to successfully create a panacea: a potion capable of curing every kind of status effect. The panacea was given to the prince, though the kingdom kept the identity of its maker secret.

An exchange student from abroad came to the palace. Upon hearing that the student was a prince from Zaidera, Sei started to panic, thinking that his arrival might have something to do with the Zaideran ship captain she recently helped in the port city of Morgenhaven.

Although Sei had done this in the name of helping someone, she had given the captain one of her special high-grade potions, which weren't available for sale to the general public. She feared that this good deed had come back to haunt her. However, the Zaideran prince's objective wasn't the Saint at all. Rather, he hoped to learn about the Kingdom of Salutania.



SEIJO NO MARYOKU WA BANNO DESU VOL. 7

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Act 1:

Departure

“SEI, you’ve got a delivery.”

“Thanks, Jude.”

I was busily making potions at the institute to deliver to the knights when Jude poked his head into the workroom with boxes in his arms. He left the package for me by the door before turning on his heel to deliver the others.

I called “thanks” to his back, got to a good stopping point, and then went to open the box. It contained new varieties of herbs and seeds along with a letter. The package was from Corinna, the head alchemist of Klausner’s Domain.

The letter opened with the usual sort of greeting, but what came next made me yelp. “No way!”

Johan Valdec, the head researcher at the institute, overheard me as he was walking past the door. He stopped to duck inside the room. “What’s wrong?”

“Oh, this is from Corinna.”

“The head alchemist from Klausner’s Domain?”

“Yes.”

I was so excited that I was unable to form full sentences. Johan gestured to try to calm me down, though I still took a couple of seconds to do so.

“So, what did she write?”

“That she managed to successfully grow the herbs.”

“Which ones? These? Whoa, aren’t these—” Johan’s eyes went round with surprise as he realized what I was so excited about.

Corinna had sent the herbs that she had managed to grow along with the letter. Johan appeared to have already realized that this was an exceedingly rare type of plant, for he was left speechless at the sight of it. It wasn’t surprising to see him fall into such a state. It was said that this sort of herb was

extremely difficult to find even in the wild. Moreover, Klausner's Domain had once been able to cultivate this species, but they had eventually ceased being able to make it grow.

This herb that Corinna had managed to successfully cultivate was an ingredient needed to make superior-grade HP potions.

"Sh-she managed to grow *this*?"



“That’s what she wrote. I tried cultivating it as well, but I didn’t have much luck.”

“What? You did?”

“Huh? Did I not tell you?”

“No, I don’t think—” Johan stopped. Then his shoulders dropped out of self-effacing shock as he recalled that I had. Lately, Johan had been pretty busy, so it was likely he had forgotten that I had informed him in advance.

I didn’t let on that I had broken out in a cold sweat; it was entirely possible that I had in fact forgotten to tell him.

Returning to the herb in question, the requirements for cultivating it had been described in a diary left behind by an alchemist who had also been a previous Saint. However, for some reason, we hadn’t been able to grow it again even under the same conditions. For that reason, Corinna and I had been experimenting to see who could manage to get it to take.

“I can’t believe she did it...”

“It’s incredible, right? I wouldn’t expect anything less from an alchemist of the holy land.”

Johan’s shoulders probably weren’t sagging like that *just* because he was tired. In all likelihood, he was disappointed that someone other than him had mastered a species of herb that was considered impossible to cultivate. He was also obsessed with the art of herbology, after all.

I shared in his frustration. But part of me was happy all the same. After all, the fact that Corinna had managed to cultivate it once meant that she could grow even more of it now.

“You look happy about all this,” Johan said.

“Of course I am. Now I can finally brew the kind of potions that I’ve been dreaming of all this time.”

“Potions?”

“Yes, the most potent sort.”

I hadn't yet been able to make superior-grade potions because they required so many ingredients that we had, until now, been unable to procure. Conversely, since we could at last obtain those herbs, surely I would now be able to do so. My Pharmaceuticals skill had already reached a sufficiently high level, after all, and that was the only other required component for the brewing.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Johan interrupted. "You can make those?"

"Corinna told me I had the skill, yes."

You had to make products of difficulty appropriate to your level in order to increase your related skills. For example, you increased your level in Pharmaceuticals by first making a large amount of low-grade potions until you gained a level high enough to make the mid-grade variety. Similarly, by making mid-grade potions of higher and higher quality, you would eventually be able to create a high-grade brew. And once you made enough high-grade potions, you would eventually be able to brew superior-grade.

I had already raised my Pharmaceuticals skill as high as I possibly could with high-grade HP potions. That meant I was now up to the task of creating the superior-grade variety.

That was where I had hit a wall with my leveling. I had been unable to find recipes for potions more powerful than the high-grade sort. That was when I'd met Corinna in Klausner's Domain and she'd taught me her secret recipe. Thanks to it, I had been able to continue raising my level. However, even that recipe had its limits, and I was, once again, no longer gaining levels. Therefore, the news of this breakthrough was welcome indeed. I hoped that once I was able to create superior-grade potions, I'd be able to start leveling up again.

You might wonder, was it really necessary for me to keep raising my level? To which I'd say, you never know what might happen. I thought it best to continue leveling up as long as I could do so.

...Although I admit that one of the reasons I was so gung-ho about this was because I'd always loved rising to ridiculous challenges in games.

"Your level is that high?" Johan asked. "Even so, I'm not sure we have enough ingredients."

“Corinna’s sent me some to work with. Besides, I was thinking of cultivating this species here at the institute too.”

“So you say, but you haven’t managed to make it take, right?”

“No, but Corinna wrote out all of the steps in her letter.”

While it was surprising that she had successfully cultivated this herb, the really surprising thing was the process required to grow it. Klausner’s Domain had a different climate as well as different soil. Despite that, the notes in her letter were incredibly useful.

Naturally, Johan knew how valuable her information was, which meant that he was yet again at a loss for words.

“She wants the superior-grade HP potions I make for her research,” I explained.

“I see...”

“Will it be all right if I send them?”

“Good question. How many do you think you can make using the ingredients we have on hand?”

“I don’t know for sure. Since I haven’t brewed them before, I can’t predict my success rate.”

“Then let’s just send them a third of however many you successfully create. The remainder we’ll keep for our own research or give to the palace for their use.”

“The palace?”

“Yes—since we haven’t been able to make anything like these in such a long time.”

No one, even amongst the alchemists who gathered in the alchemist’s holy land, could make superior-grade potions. I didn’t know how long it had been since anyone had last been able to brew them, but doing so had to be quite the remarkable feat if we were actually going to surrender my yield to the palace. Furthermore, the herbs themselves were valuable, so I would be behooved not to use them all.

However, this all meant that I now had express permission to make superior-grade HP potions.

As we were discussing how many herbs to reserve, another researcher came into the room. He walked straight over to us; it seemed he had business with Johan. “Sorry to interrupt, but there’s a messenger from the palace.”

“Oh? Why?”

“He’s here to speak with both you and Sei. He’s waiting in the parlor to meet with you directly.”

“All right. We’ll be right there.”

Someone from the palace wished to say something to me? I wondered what it could be about. I tried to think of a reason but came up empty. Johan seemed as perplexed as I was.

The only way to find out would be to talk to the messenger. So, the two of us headed to the parlor.

The day after we received the messenger from the palace, Johan and I brought ourselves to the king’s office. We had heard that he wanted to speak with us about Zaidera. That was all we had learned from the messenger—and here we’d thought we’d get more details out of the guy.

As for those details, though...

When I heard it had something to do with Zaidera, the first thing that popped into my head was Prince Ten’yu and the panacea. Prince Ten’yu’s mother was a concubine of the Zaideran emperor, and she had suffered from an illness for a long time. The prince had come to study in the Kingdom of Salutania to search for a medicine that could cure her. It was then that I’d made the panacea—a brand-new type of medicine that I’d created based on the symptoms the prince described to me.

The panacea didn’t adhere to any existing Salutanian theories of medicine; I had made it without using any herbs at all. The ingredients had been apples grown using my Saintly magic and honey made from apple blossoms.

I had been absolutely stymied as to how to make the panacea when Albert returned from a trip home with some honey for me as a souvenir. That was when I'd remembered that, in my original world, it had been said that honey was good for all kinds of sicknesses. They also said that "an apple a day keeps the doctor away."

So, I'd come up with the idea to combine the two and tried to make a potion with them. In the end, it had worked. I had created a panacea.

As the name suggested, the panacea was able to cure any kind of abnormal status effect, no matter what it was. It was much, much more effective than any other status cure potion that had been invented before that point.

For that reason, the panacea had been surrendered to the palace's custody. Even though I had managed to create something that could help Prince Ten'yu, the king had been the one to ultimately decide whether to give it to him. Or not.

However, I'd later learned that the king had surpassed my expectations and gifted the panacea to Prince Ten'yu, though he had concealed the identity of its maker.

I didn't know what exactly had happened when he gave Prince Ten'yu the panacea, nor did I know if it had made it to Prince Ten'yu's mother. Perhaps during this meeting I would at last learn both of these things.

I had tried to come up with other ideas as to why I might have been summoned, but there was nothing. I figured the only way to find out for sure was by talking to the king, so I'd accepted the messenger's invitation and he had returned to the palace.

"Thank you for coming. Please, have a seat."

The prime minister was also in the king's office.

At the king's encouragement, Johan and I sat down next to one another on the sofa. At the same time, the king waved his hand and the chamberlains and knights who were present in the room exited.

Once there was no one in the room but the four of us, the prime minister said, "We summoned you here today to discuss some gifts that have arrived for

you from Zaidera.”

Gifts from Zaidera? That was *not* what I had been expecting.

The prime minister seemed to perceive my confusion since he subsequently offered an explanation. According to him, the gifts had arrived two days prior. They were from Prince Ten’yuu, of course, who had sent them as a token of appreciation for the kingdom’s acceptance of his sudden request to study at the Royal Academy, and for enabling him to make so many new acquaintances.

The things he had sent were all of the sort that the people of the various research institutes and facilities he had visited could use. For example, books about river management and Zaideran crops, ores and gems found in his home country, and so on.

Since there was more than enough to go around, the palace had decided to give a share of the haul to each facility. The Research Institute of Medicinal Flora was no exception—for us, the prince had sent seedlings and seeds for herbs that were native to Zaidera.

“Here is a list of what has been sent for your research institute.”

“I shall take a look.” Johan scanned the list that the prime minister handed him. He didn’t try to hide the way his eyes sparkled.

I peeked over his shoulder and couldn’t help but be amazed as well. The name of the first plant I caught on was one that Prince Ten’yuu had told me was rare even in Zaidera. If I remembered correctly, Johan had been present for that conversation and said he would like to see the herb himself someday. I definitely understood why he was having a hard time controlling his expression.

Just as I was looking further down the list in Johan’s hands to see if there were any other kinds of rare plants, the prime minister said, “And these are for Lady Sei.”

“For me?”

Only then did I finally understand why I had been summoned. After all, if the gifts had been exclusively for the institute, they only would have summoned Johan. That was why I had been at such a loss as to why my presence was necessary.

“Yes,” he said. “After all, you were the one who provided the panacea.”

But... The king had been the one to give Prince Ten’yuu the panacea. If he hadn’t told the prince that I was its creator, and the gifts were specifically thanks for the panacea, then shouldn’t they be for the king?

Then again, if it’s a reward for whoever made the panacea, then it should be okay for me to accept it, right?

The prime minister wore a kind smile in lieu of his usual solemn expression, so I couldn’t get a read on the intentions underlying the gift.

When he noticed my hesitation, the prime minister added that the gifts were merely daily necessities, such as stationery.

Was it really okay for me to accept such a thing? I looked at Johan for reassurance, and he gave me a solemn nod. I then told the prime minister that I would indeed assent to receive the generous gift, *etc.* It was decided that my reward would be sent together with the presents for the institute when they were delivered later.

The following afternoon, the packages from the palace arrived.

The researchers and I were ecstatic when we saw all the seeds and seedlings that had been brought to the storehouse. We immediately looked over the books, which detailed how best to grow our new charges. After discussing where and when we’d plant them, I headed back to my room, where I had asked the institute’s servants to send the packages addressed to me.

The prime minister had called them “daily necessities,” but I wondered what exactly that meant. He’d mentioned stationery, so perhaps it was paper made in Zaidera.

If that was so, then I looked forward to opening the package. Prince Ten’yuu had said that papermaking flourished in Zaidera and that they even made paper colored with dyes and fancy paper printed with designs.

Full of excitement, I returned to my chambers to find boxes of various sizes stacked on top of my desk. Most of them were ordinary, but there was a black

box among them that caught my eye. I hadn't seen boxes of such make in a long time, but unless I was mistaken, it was the sort one used for lacquerware.

I felt a bit apprehensive as I approached the desk to get a closer look. What I found left me greatly perplexed.

It was indeed a lacquerware box. I had been unable to tell until I got closer, but plant designs were embossed along the sides. And that wasn't all—the rim also sported decorations, painted in gold and silver.

The lid was especially gorgeous. A part of the design, near the center, even shone like a rainbow. Yup, it had been inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

I couldn't help falling into a trance as I stared at the extravagant box. What the heck was this thing? It was too big to be a mere letter box. Maybe you were supposed to put documents in it? I couldn't think of any other uses.

I decided I couldn't just wonder. It was time to find out what had been sent.

So, I moved to pick up the letter box (maybe?) that I had been examining. It was then that I sensed something unusual. The box was heavier than I had expected. *Much* heavier.

Finding this curious, I opened the lid, and within the box I found a tea set. The pieces were made of simple white porcelain, but their shape was very interesting indeed.

The teapot distinctly differed from the sort that was popular in Salutania: Its body and handle were both angular. The cups, meanwhile, were small and had no handles. They were less like the European style of teacup than they were chawan tea bowls—like the kind you might use when drinking Chinese tea.

Memories of Japan made me newly nostalgic. I picked up one of the cups to better examine it. That was when I noticed the faint pattern on the side. I had to look very closely to make it out, but when I did, I made out a lotus flower design. When I returned to looking over the teapot, I saw that it had the same design. How fancy.



“Taking a look at everything?”

“Oh, Johan.”

As I was gazing at the pattern on the teacup, I heard a voice at the door, which I hadn’t bothered to close. I glanced back to see my friend. It seemed he had been curious about my gift as well.

“What did you get?” he asked.

“The prime minister suggested it would be stationery, but there’s more than just that.” I held out the teacup to show him.

At my invitation, Johan walked into the room. “What’s this?”

“A teacup, I believe. If you look closer, you’ll see the design on its side. It’s very pretty, don’t you think?”

“Oh, my, you’re right. I’ve never seen anything with a design quite like this. It must have taken a great deal of skill to create.”

The way Johan said it with such wonder gave me a disquieting feeling. A great deal of skill?

“A skilled artisan would have had to make these?”

“Well, yes, wouldn’t that make sense? Since this *is* in thanks for the panacea.”

“For the panacea...”

“Indeed. Compensation for a potion that the royal family supposedly kept under lock and key. Prince Ten’yuu couldn’t have sent anything but the best in return.”

“So, what you’re telling me, then, is that these are pretty expensive?”

“Most likely, yes.”

“Ooooh, dear me.”

I had been right to feel so apprehensive about these deliveries. I crouched down on the spot, clutching my head.

It only made sense, though. Johan was right. There was no way that the prince could express his thanks for receiving a treasure from the royal family

with items of ordinary quality.

Uuugh, “daily necessities” sure is a way to phrase it...

Johan had clearly guessed that my gifts would be especially valuable when the prime minister mentioned that they were repayment for the panacea. That explained the serious look on his face when he'd nodded to me.

Still, I really wished he had warned me! That said, I understood that Johan wouldn't have said anything that might make me want to decline something in front of the prime minister.

I made up my mind as I gazed at the valuable gifts before me. At the end of the day, I have no one but myself to blame for accepting. I shouldn't have trusted the prime minister's smile. I'll have to be more wary of that expression in the future!

The clear and beautiful sound of a woman's laughter floated through the gazebo in the palace gardens. The owner of the voice was Liz, who was so pretty that even the blooming flowers behind her couldn't compete with her visage.

Lately, Aira, Liz, and I had been enjoying a number of tea parties together, but for once, Aira was absent. Thus, on that day, it was just the two of us. It had been a while since it was just me and Liz.

“His Excellency sure got you there,” Liz giggled.

“You can say that again,” I replied wearily.

We were talking about all of the things Zaidera had delivered to me via the king just days ago. By “His Excellency,” Liz referred to Prime Minister Goltz, who had told me the gifts were simple enough—and there I'd been, taking him at his word. I was moaning about how all of it was so much more expensive than I had thought it would be.

Aside from the tea set, which must have taken quite a lot of skill to craft, I had also received beautiful writing paper—just as I had hoped—as well as a white paperweight exquisitely carved in the shape of a dragon, a transparent

calligraphy brush holder with similar lotus designs engraved upon it, and lustrous fabric in vibrant colors, among other things.

Technically all of these items could be considered daily necessities, but they were also the kinds of things that you wouldn't ordinarily use.

I was really, really hoping it was just my imagination that the paperweight was the color of ivory and that the brush holder was so crystalline. I wanted to believe I was overthinking things, because if I wasn't, it would be bad for my mental health.

"This teapot was one of the things you received, yes?"

"That's right. It looks like it's just white porcelain at a glance, but there's a design on the side if you look close enough."

The teapot we were using was the one from Zaidera. It had been the first thing I noticed in the set. But since it was a gift and all, I'd decided that I ought to take the opportunity to use it during this tea party.

According to my etiquette instructor, a certain level of formality was required when unveiling such a rare and expensive item. As such, even though this tea party was only between friends, that friend was the daughter of a marquis and betrothed to a prince. Therefore, I was certain that unveiling a gift from Zaidera was right on track. Surely my teacher wouldn't be angry to hear about this. Or at least, I prayed as much.

"My, you're right. It has such an unusual shape too."

"I suppose it would look unusual to you, but I like it. There were some teacups that came with it, and those are atypical as well."

"How so?"

Unlike the teacups generally found in the Kingdom of Salutania, the ones that had come with this teapot were perfectly round and smooth-sided. I hadn't wanted to take Liz by surprise by presenting her with all kinds of things she wasn't accustomed to using, so I'd only brought the teapot for this party.

At Liz's query, the maid who was waiting on us held out a tray with the cups upon it. I thanked her and picked one up to hold out in front of Liz. "This is one

of them.”

“It seems it has no handle.”

“Indeed. I was afraid it might confuse you, so I decided not to whip them out today.”

“I see. I appreciate your concern. But given that lack of handle, how exactly do you drink from it?”

“I believe you fill it up just over halfway, then hold the top half of the cup from above—like this.”

“You already know how to use it?”

“I’m only guessing because we had similar teacups back in Japan. Zaidera might use them somewhat differently,” I explained. Then I handed it back over to the maid, since I was afraid that I might accidentally break it if I kept holding it.

Liz watched the maid take the cup and then raised her hand. At her signal, the maid and our guards, both of them knights, stepped away from us.

She always has such control of the situation, I thought with admiration. But I also gave her a puzzled look. Why had she done this?

“I’m sure you’ll have a chance to learn how they use these cups in Zaidera soon enough,” said Liz.

“What do you mean?”

Salutania and Zaidera had begun trading regularly, and their transactions were gradually growing in scope. My company had started importing all kinds of things from Zaidera, and now others were following suit.

As exchanges between the two countries continued, so it followed that there had been an influx in the presence of Zaideran culture as well. It was likely only a matter of time before Zaideran etiquette became popularized, which would include knowledge of how to use these kinds of teacups.

But I got the feeling that this wasn’t what Liz was referring to, based on how she had phrased her comment. I was a little afraid to ask, but I couldn’t help my curiosity and wound up requesting an explanation.

“Just between you and me, we will be sending a delegation to Zaidera,” said Liz.

“Like a diplomatic party?”

“Precisely. Many of our research institutions have requested permission to seek an opportunity to study abroad in Zaidera.”

A multitude of Zaideran books had been among the gifts from Prince Ten’yuu. The books had been distributed to the relevant research institutions, and upon reading them, the researchers had discovered that they were packed with new information. Many of our institutions had been stuck in their investigations but then been able to continue thanks to the data in those books, so there was a flurry of progress being made across the board.

While we could learn a lot by studying books, the researchers had begun to wonder how much more knowledge they could accrue if they met and talked with researchers in Zaidera. The people who had come up with new ideas while conversing with Prince Ten’yuu during his visits were especially interested. And so, they had petitioned the king to grant them the opportunity to study in Zaidera as well.

“Wow, so that’s why they’ll be sending people.”

“The king has also begun to consider whether studying abroad would be beneficial for certain projects.”

I couldn’t disagree with that. Even at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, conversing with Prince Ten’yuu had sparked wonderful new ideas—and the prince wasn’t even an expert on herbology. If we could speak with actual experts, I was sure our research would bear even more fruit.

“Does that mean people will be dispatched from every research institute?”

“I believe so.”

I wondered who would be sent from ours. I would have wanted to go myself, but I doubted they would give me permission. I hadn’t heard of any new black swamps being discovered, but there were still more monsters than usual roaming about the kingdom.

It would be nice if I could go once the situation is better, I thought as I sipped my tea.

The next thing Liz said took me by surprise: “Prince Kyle will be the ambassador for the delegation.”

“Wait, you mean the crown prince?”

“The very same.”

I asked her again just in case. I just couldn’t square what she said with my initial assumptions.

I supposed the son of an emperor had led the delegation from Zaidera. It only made sense that a prince from Salutania would be in charge of our delegation to match their initial display.

But was Liz okay with this? I had heard that Liz and Prince Kyle were to be wed as soon as they graduated from the academy. If things proceeded as planned, that meant that they would be married in less than a year.

Prince Ten’yuu’s decision to study abroad had taken less than a year, including travel time, but that was only because of extraordinary circumstances. Studying abroad typically meant being gone for well over that time in this world. If Prince Kyle was going to Zaidera as part of a delegation, then I doubted he’d be able to marry Liz in accordance with their original plan.

Did that mean the wedding would be postponed? When they graduated, Liz would only be fifteen years old. By Japan’s standards, there wouldn’t have been a problem if they waited a year or two to marry, but it was a different story here.

I went quiet as I sank into thought. Liz seemed entirely unbothered by all this, though, and she took a sip of tea. Then, as if she had guessed what I was thinking, she said, “This is also just between you and me, but my betrothal to Prince Kyle has been called off.”

“Huh?”

Liz had dropped that bomb as if it were nothing special.

She’s no longer engaged to him?! Why?! Isn’t that a huge deal?

I flailed about in astonishment. But Liz was the picture of calm as a slight smile played across her lips.

“I’m about to become awfully busy,” she said. “I foresee myself being invited to many tea parties.”

“*That’s* what you’re concerned about? Why tea parties, though?” I stared at her in confusion, unable to figure out the connection between her broken engagement and tea parties, of all things.

“Because a great number of people will be wanting to introduce me to their sons or brothers,” Liz explained.

As Liz was not yet an adult, she couldn’t attend any evening parties. On the other hand, she could grace social gatherings held during the day. That meant that noble ladies would be hosting tea parties, the fundamental gathering around which all noble socialization revolved, to try to show off their sons and brothers to Liz. In other words, they would be trying to hawk her a new potential fiancé. If Liz showed interest, then the nobles would take the opportunity to formally introduce her to the young man.

I thought it strange that people would do this the instant after her engagement had been called off, but that was just the way of it. I still had a lot to learn about life in Salutania, and if Liz said it was so, then it undoubtedly was.

In addition, Liz was a great catch in terms of her looks, mind, and family’s social standing—as one would expect from a woman who had been selected to be a prince’s fiancée. Liz was also popular, so I could somewhat understand why people would be scrambling to try to hook her up with their family members. Even so, it was extremely calculating on their part.

“I am accustomed to this sort of thing from high society, but it can be a bit of a nuisance,” Liz admitted.

“You said it. I can kind of see how it would be.” I tried to imagine it, and it sure sounded like it would be annoying.

I had no issue with hearing good things about people I had never met. However, it would be a bit of a problem if someone spent a whole tea party talking up a stranger. It seemed like the kind of thing where your face muscles

would start to hurt from all the polite smiling you would have to do.

“You know, this applies to you as well,” Liz pointed out.

“I don’t think—” I tried to protest, but Liz interrupted me.

“It does. You’re even more popular than I am.”

“I doubt—” I tried to deny it again, but she interrupted me once more.

“It’s true, though.”

My cheek twitched at the smile on Liz’s face, which seemed unusually, ah, sinister.

“You’ve already made your debut into high society, and you haven’t had much work recently, yes? I’m sure you too shall be receiving invitations before long.”

“Invitations? To tea parties?”

“That—and to parties in the evening as well, I’m sure.”

“What?” My voice reflexively took on a tired tone upon hearing this, eliciting a chuckle from Liz.

Then, as if trying to deliver the killing blow, Liz suggested that a large quantity of invitations had very likely already arrived for me at the palace.

I wanted to believe it couldn’t be true, but only a few days after that tea party, Johan summoned me to his office, and I learned that Liz had been all too right.

Behind the Scenes

THE IMPERIAL VILLA where Ten'yuu spent his time was located a short distance from the imperial palace of Zaidera. He had once had his own chambers within the imperial palace, but due to certain circumstances, he had moved out of them. He still retained an office in the palace for work, but he had also had one built for himself here.

Ten'yuu had done all of this in order to remain by his mother's side. She had succumbed to an unknown illness, and it had been unknown how long she would remain in this world.

The soft rays of the afternoon sun streamed into his office in the imperial villa. He could hear the faint sound of laughter carried on the breeze. The sound of that voice made him stop writing.

It was his mother's. She was likely having an animated conversation with her maid. The fact that he could hear it all the way in his office meant that they were having tea in the courtyard, or something like that.

Imagining his mother's happiness brought a smile to Ten'yuu's lips.

One of the attendants doing paperwork with Ten'yuu smiled when he saw the prince's expression. "It sounds like she's returned to her old self."

"It does," said Ten'yuu. "She can't move her body like she used to, likely as a result of being bedridden for so long, but it seems she's regained enough of her strength to go out to the courtyard again."

They spoke of Ten'yuu's mother. The attendant had served Ten'yuu ever since he was a young child, so he was familiar with how long the prince's mother had been debilitated by her condition.

"It's quite fortunate that the medicine worked," said the attendant.

"It is." Ten'yuu nodded as he recalled what had led him to find the cure.

The commoners of Zaidera typically practiced monogamy, but the emperor and other noblemen took multiple wives. The higher a man's rank in society, the more wives he could claim; supposedly the emperor had thousands.

Naturally, there were many opinions about the exact number of wives the emperor had. Some assumed that every single woman who lived in the inner court—the part of the imperial palace where the emperor's wives resided—numbered among them.

While it was said that the current emperor had fewer wives than his predecessors, there were nevertheless several hundreds of women in that court.

The more wives one had, the more children one could produce. The current emperor had over forty altogether, and Ten'yuu was the eighteenth prince among them.

Only men could inherit the throne, but Ten'yuu was low in line of succession, since he had seventeen older brothers. Additionally, his mother had been the daughter of a low-ranked noble whose family had no real power. She was currently considered the emperor's seventh wife, but she had originally held far less prestige. She had only risen after giving birth to Ten'yuu.

Therefore, Ten'yuu would have stood little chance of actually succeeding the throne even if he had been the first-born prince. In fact, he might not even have survived childhood if he'd been born first. When powerless wives of the inner court became pregnant with boys, it was common for both mother and child to mysteriously pass away.

Having been born and raised in this kind of environment, Ten'yuu had been brought up to be less than self-assertive. He had a brilliant mind, enough so that he could be considered among the most intelligent of the princes, but in public, he only demonstrated an interest in arithmetic and the natural sciences. He showed no interest whatsoever in politics. This was Ten'yuu's secret to success.

If one stood out too much, one endangered their own life. His mother had relentlessly warned him of this, but he had soon learned the lesson firsthand after observing how everyone in the inner court behaved.

It appeared to have been the right course of action, in the end. While they

had been under dangerous scrutiny for a time, as Ten'yuu grew up, people had stopped paying attention to him or his mother.

Then, after Ten'yuu's mother fell ill, he had started to devote himself to the study of medicinal herbs and medical treatments.

In this time, his mother's rank had not improved. As a result, even though she was sick, she wasn't afforded the same degree of care that the emperor and his empress would have received; she was provided treatments that merely slowed the progression of the disease.

The absence of a cure wasn't only due to her low rank. Her strength gradually deteriorated until she reached the point that she could no longer move her hands and feet. There was no precedent for this condition. Therefore, the foremost reason for her ongoing illness was simply that no one knew how to treat it.

After overcoming hardships in the inner court together, Ten'yuu and his mother had developed a strong bond. Even though the physician declared that there was no effective method of treating her, Ten'yuu had refused to give up. He began searching for one on his own.

Looking for a means by which to alleviate symptoms no one had ever heard of was extremely difficult. Ten'yuu read every single book in the imperial palace of Zaidera, but he found nothing, not even a hint of an answer. Nevertheless, his dear mother's life was on the line, so Ten'yuu continued his search.

Before long, he determined that he would be unable to accomplish his goal on his own. He thus recruited more people who would be loyal to his cause, though he took care not to garner the attention of those in the inner court.

Around this time, Ten'yuu and his mother were given permission to move to the imperial villa. While in so doing they isolated themselves, it was more convenient for Ten'yuu, as it enabled him to act on a grander scale than he had been able to while operating under the eyes of political rivals. Despite that, he remained unable to find any information about diseases linked to his mother's symptoms.

At last, when his mother became so bedridden and he had all but given up, one of Ten'yuu's people sent him a message: a report stating that there was an

incredible alchemist in the Kingdom of Salutania, a country with which Zaidera had recently struck up trade.

“Is something the matter?” Ten’yuu’s attendant had asked as Ten’yuu stared at the report.

“Ah, no. It’s just that I find this report difficult to believe.”

Having come back to his senses, Ten’yuu relayed the contents of the missive. The attendant was just as surprised.

“Someone in Morgenhaven is capable of brewing high-grade potions?”

“So it seems.”

Neither Ten’yuu nor his attendant could believe the sudden report. Taking into account what they considered common knowledge in Zaidera, it was simply ridiculous. However, according to the report, this follower of Ten’yuu—a ship captain—had received a potion from a merchant woman that had completely healed grievous bone fractures in two limbs. The report also detailed how the injured man had been given many potions before this one, but only the high-grade brew had been so effective as to heal both his legs—and simultaneously, at that.

The attendant took the report and frowned as he read it over. “If this report is accurate, it does indeed sound like the person who made the potion must live in that city.”

The captain had written that, based on the fact that a commoner in Morgenhaven had been carrying a high-grade HP potion on her person, the maker was likely also in Morgenhaven. Except that had turned out to be unlikely as well.

How could a commoner actually afford such a potion? This was what bothered both Ten’yuu and his attendant, and they were skeptical that the maker of said potion could be found in some port town.

A person who could afford such a potion had to be either a very wealthy merchant or someone capable of employing a uniquely proficient alchemist. But the captain claimed he had been unable to locate any such merchants in Morgenhaven.

As Ten'yuu looked at the report, a new idea suddenly entered his head. *Then was that commoner truly a commoner? Perhaps the woman who gave him the potion wasn't actually a merchant but a noble dressed as one?*

Zaidera and the Kingdom of Salutania had only just begun trading with one another. However, Ten'yuu had learned a few things about the other nation already—one being that it was far more likely for a noble to walk around town in a commoner's guise than for alchemists skilled enough to make high-grade potions to be found in any city but the capital.

If this woman was actually a noble, then either she received the potion from a wealthy company or...the palace?

All Zaideran alchemists capable of making high-grade potions worked for the emperor. Therefore, only the imperial family and high-ranking nobles could acquire them. Ten'yuu didn't know if it was exactly the same in the Kingdom of Salutania, but surely the situation was similar. Ten'yuu felt he could assume that much based on what little he had learned about the Kingdom of Salutania as well as his own lived wisdom as a Zaideran.

When he took his mother's condition into consideration, the best thing to do would be to invite the alchemist to Zaidera. If the alchemist did in fact live in Morgenhaven, then it might even be possible to invite them directly to the Zaideran imperial palace with the promise of a great reward.

However, if they were an alchemist in the employ of the king of Salutania or a noble, things would be more difficult. Even if that sort of person could be promised high pay, the idea of coming to live and work in a foreign country where one didn't speak the language held little appeal for most people.

If it was someone who was enthusiastic about herbology, though, they might be lured by the prospect of plants found only in the empire...

But Ten'yuu had options other than inviting this alchemist to come. For example, he could also try to gather information.

In every nation of this world, royal palaces were the beacon around which people of outstanding skill gathered. The alchemists attached to Salutania's palace would surely know all about the herbs found there, as well as different kinds of illnesses. Perhaps there was some plant native to their lands that was

as yet unknown in Zaidera.

However, it would be one thing for Ten'yuu to ask his followers to contact alchemists who worked for merchants and other business ventures, but it would be difficult for any of them to reach alchemists in a royal palace.

Then what were his options?

After much consideration, Ten'yuu decided that he would study abroad in the Kingdom of Salutania.

Once Ten'yuu came to that decision, he was quick to act. After some behind-the-scenes maneuvering, he submitted his request to study in Salutania at astounding speed.

The people of the inner court were always on their guard against whatever might prove a hindrance to their own ulterior motives. Although Ten'yuu made his arrangements efficiently, it wouldn't have been unusual if he drew their attention.

Yet they made no move against him or his mother—because the emperor supported Ten'yuu in this endeavor. It seemed that he was hoping Ten'yuu would bring back some manner of new technology from Salutania.

Thus, with the backing of the emperor, preparations were swiftly made for Ten'yuu to study abroad. As a result, a mere week after the letter of acceptance from Salutania arrived, Ten'yuu left Zaidera.

After a long voyage at sea, Ten'yuu arrived in the Kingdom of Salutania. The ship reached land at a port city called Morgenhaven. From what he could make out of the city from the ship's deck, it was completely unlike anything he had ever known. He truly felt like he had come to a foreign country.

"We have finally arrived."

"Indeed."

Ten'yuu wasn't the only one who had come to Salutania. His followers had come along with him. The one speaking to him at that moment was one of them, by the name of Ceyran. He was the captain of the ship on which Ten'yuu

had traveled, as well as the one who had sent the initial report about the alchemist.

“Shall we go along as planned as soon as we disembark?” asked Ceyran.

“Yes. I want you and your men to scour the cities for the alchemist. Be sure to report back regularly, even if you don’t manage to locate them.”

“Understood.”

The members of Ten’yuu’s entourage who had come to Salutania split into two groups. Ten’yuu led one in search of information on the alchemist in the palace while Ceyran and the rest searched the city. Even though Ceyran had been unable to locate the alchemist before, there was as yet a chance that they weren’t at the palace.

Ten’yuu wasn’t only in Salutania in the role of exchange student but also a diplomatic special envoy. Since trade had begun to expand between Zaidera and the kingdom, he was tasked with finding ways to deepen the relationship between the countries.

As he was visiting as a special envoy, there was to be a welcoming ceremony for Ten’yuu and his entourage at the kingdom’s royal palace. There would be two parts to this ceremony: first, his audience with the king, and second, a party in the evening.

Naturally, as the guest of honor, Ten’yuu would attend both.

That’s the “Saint”?

During the audience, the person standing closest to the platform on which the king stood was a woman wearing a white veil. Ten’yuu glanced at her for just a moment and guessed, based on her position and dress, that she was the Saint.

Ten’yuu had learned about the Saint while preparing for his departure. The information he had been provided on Salutania was more or less common knowledge for everyone. Therefore, he was only aware that her job was to cleanse miasma.

So, she’s Salutania’s Hero. Ten’yuu recalled what he had learned about the

Saint as he walked down the carpet leading to the king.

The Saint used a special kind of magic that no one else could wield to slay monsters.

In Zaidera, they called a person who possessed the power to defeat monsters at exceptional speed a “Hero.” But “Hero” wasn’t a word to denote someone who could use a special sort of magic, like the Saint could. It simply meant someone who demonstrated great skill in defeating monsters—for example, those who wielded ordinary weapons with exceptional finesse while doing so.

There was, as such, a distinct difference between the capabilities of Salutania’s Saint and a Zaideran Hero. This was in part because Hero was a title of honor in Zaidera, bestowed by the emperor’s own hand. Because of that, the person who was currently called the Hero in Zaidera was merely someone who excelled at dispatching monsters; unlike Salutania’s Saint Sei, they possessed no special powers.

This public knowledge was why Ten’yuu had no reason to believe that Sei might have unique abilities; he immediately lost interest in learning anything more about her. If he had known that the Saint possessed extraordinary skill in Holy Magic, he likely wouldn’t have been so quick to dismiss her.

After the ceremony, Ten’yuu set straight to work. He proceeded directly to the Royal Academy and each of the research institutes on palace grounds, gathering all sorts of information about Salutania.

He wished he could have focused solely on the institutes related to medicine, but fearing that the Salutanians would take advantage of an obvious need, he decided it would be better to conceal his true objective. This was why Ten’yuu chose to investigate topics unrelated to medicine as well.

As he visited the various research institutes, the day finally came for him to arrive at his main goal: the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. He visited it with the faintest bit of hope in his heart, but the outcome nevertheless disappointed.

It wasn’t that he didn’t learn anything at all—he acquired all manner of information, such as the current state of potion development in the country as well as data on medicinal plants native to Salutania. Unfortunately, none of it

could be connected to his mother's illness.

While Ten'yuu felt a bit discouraged, he didn't give up. There was only so much one could learn in a single day of observation. Perhaps if he found time to visit again, he could converse with the institute's researchers further and potentially learn something of value.

After his observation, Ten'yuu made his way to the exit of the institute, pondering his next move. Was he just being stubborn? What was he doing here?

With his personal attendant and knight escort in tow, Ten'yuu was walking down the halls of the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora when he passed a window and overheard some of the researchers talking through an opened crack.

It was as if he had received a divine revelation.

"Oh! This is the day Sei's not supposed to be here, right?"

"That's right. Weren't you listening to Johan this morning?"

"I completely forgot. Darn. Here I was hoping I could get some potions for my experiments today."

As he was being accompanied by Salutanian knights, Ten'yuu only very subtly glanced in the direction of the speakers. He spied two researchers headed toward the entrance of the institute. They must have just been coming back from somewhere.

Many people at this institute could make potions. That said, not all of them could make every kind of potion known to the world—after all, potions had different potencies, and you had to increase your Pharmaceuticals skill level in order to make those of higher grades. If the person speaking outside the window could only make low-grade potions and they needed mid-grade ones for their experiment, then it only made sense that they would ask someone else to brew it for them.

But what caught Ten'yuu's interest was the name the researcher had mentioned. He had just heard that same name just a little earlier. While he was discussing potion-making with a researcher, another one had walked into the

room while calling for someone named “Sei.” After realizing that “Sei” wasn’t there, they had left.

That had been the entirety of the event, but now something was bothering Ten’yuu, and he couldn’t get it out of his mind. Perhaps it was because the researcher had, for a moment, stared at Ten’yuu’s face in astonishment.

That night, right as he was about to go to bed, Ten’yuu spoke with his personal attendant in a hushed voice. “So, you know that institute I went to today?”

“Yes. Did something happen there?”

“Indeed. I’d like to go there again, if possible. Unaccompanied.”

Thus Ten’yuu asked to once again visit the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. As it was right before bed, the attendant and Ten’yuu were the only ones in the room. However, he was afraid of the possibility that the guards posted by the door could overhear him, so he didn’t voice his true reason for wanting to visit.

Nevertheless, the attendant had served the prince for a long time now and understood his intention without him having to say it. The attendant frowned at the thought of Ten’yuu acting on his own but agreed so long as he was allowed to go with him.

As Sei hadn’t been at the institute, they had no idea what this person looked like or what personality they might have. Based on the fact that other researchers wanted to ask Sei to make potions for them, though, Ten’yuu surmised that their Pharmaceuticals skill level must be high. Perhaps someone like that might know of rare herbs or a potion that could alleviate his mother’s symptoms. At the same time, the prince believed that this same level of proficiency would be a barrier.

Outside the palace, as well as within it, the identities of people with a high level of skill in a given area were kept secret in order to prevent others from recruiting them. Ten’yuu couldn’t immediately determine whether this person named Sei was being hidden from him on purpose or whether they simply hadn’t been there during his observation. The former was certainly a possibility.

Therefore, he aimed to visit the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora on his own without the knowledge of his hosts.

When staying in the palace of a foreign country, going anywhere without the permission of those who ran the palace wasn't something one could ordinarily do. Ten'yuu would have only one chance to pull this off, so it was no exaggeration to say that he had practically no chance of meeting Sei. Nevertheless, he tried.

And it was there, in the herb gardens of the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, that Ten'yuu ran into a researcher who looked like someone from his own country: a woman with black hair and black eyes who called herself Sei.

Ten'yuu and his attendant's actions were considered problematic, just as he had predicted. Despite that, because there had been some issues on the Salutanian side, they got off with an admonishment. Perhaps that was because Ten'yuu immediately apologized for his sudden urge to take a walk. Naturally, they made it difficult for him to do so again by both increasing the number of guards assigned to always accompany him and making sure he was never alone.

Even so, Ten'yuu had managed to meet the person he was looking for, so he considered this an acceptable trade-off.

After meeting the researcher who called herself Sei, Ten'yuu increased the frequency of his visits to the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. This gave him more chances to speak with the people who worked there, and he even grew to be on friendly terms with some of them.

However, after running into Sei in the herb gardens, he didn't see her again on his visits. When he considered what the other researchers had said, perhaps it was the case that Sei did some jobs for the institute but usually worked elsewhere.

After learning that she looked like a Zaideran, though, Ten'yuu couldn't help becoming more curious about her—perhaps especially so since he dared to wonder whether she might possess some of the knowledge he sought.

So, every time he saw the researchers he had befriended, he asked if Sei was

in. Their boss surely realized that Ten'yuu was interested in her, because not too long after that, she started appearing regularly at the research institute. As such, after their second meeting, whenever Ten'yuu visited the institute, she was usually there.

Sei was typically occupied in the same sort of potion-making work every time Ten'yuu came. Her Pharmaceuticals skill had to be high, considering that the rest of the institute's staff asked her to make potions for them as well.

Or so Ten'yuu thought, but unfortunately, she revealed that she couldn't make high-grade potions. Ten'yuu was discouraged to hear this, but then he had a fortunate turn.

As he was indirectly trying to plumb the depths of Sei's knowledge base, Sei started researching high-grade status cure potions. She claimed that he had inspired her interest in them. This was fortunate for Ten'yuu, as it was more or less what he himself was looking for: the kinds of potions that could cure all manner of illness.

The problem lay in the fact that status cure potion recipes differed based on the kind of symptoms one intended to cure. Zaidera had recipes for all manner of specific status cure potions, but none of these had done anything for his mother's condition.

But perhaps there was something different to be found in Salutania? One day, Sei borrowed a book containing recipes for high-grade status cure potions from the palace library, and Ten'yuu was a bit hopeful as he scanned it alongside her.

He pretended to quickly glance through it as he searched for a page describing the kind of potion he was searching for. Unfortunately, the book only contained the same recipes that he had already tried; there was nothing new to be found.

Just when Ten'yuu had thought he might be close, he suddenly found himself at a loss again. It left him incredibly frustrated.

"Is this a record of every single one of the recipes for high-grade status cure potions made in this kingdom?" The question just slipped out of his mouth. By the time he had realized what he had asked, it was already too late.

Ten'yuu had been so careful not to give away the real reason for his journey to the kingdom. He had made sure never to ask any of the institute researchers any direct questions. But he realized in that moment that he had begun to let his guard slip ever since he began to visit this particular institute.

Was it because of his wavering emotions? Or maybe he had just taken to relaxing around Sei because, after being away from home for so long, she looked like someone he could have met back in Zaidera. Or perhaps it was a combination of both factors.

Just as he was fretting over his mistake, Sei asked a question that approached the heart of his goal: "Is there a particular kind you're looking for?"

This was his chance.

However, Ten'yuu couldn't answer her. He thought it over for a moment, but after remembering the mistake he had just made, he decided against confession.

Although Sei looked disappointed to hear him deny it, she changed the topic. She made a joke with an intentionally cheerful voice, perhaps because she wanted to lighten the darkened mood. She sighed about how nice it would be if there were a kind of potion that could cure any kind of ailment: a panacea.

The very concept was preposterous, but Ten'yuu liked the sound of it. If only...

In the end, Ten'yuu merely smiled and said, "It really would be nice if such a potion existed."

Then, on a day after Ten'yuu finally confided in Sei, having reached the end of his rope as he searched for a cure for his mother's condition, he heard that word again. Panacea.

On that day, Ten'yuu was occupying himself in the chambers the kingdom had provided him when someone arrived who introduced themselves as a messenger from the king. He said that the king was summoning Ten'yuu for a private meeting.

It was too late in the day for a typical summons, and Ten'yuu had never seen

this messenger before. It went without saying that he found it incredibly suspicious. Normally, he would have refused because of the hour, but some kind of hunch told him to accept.

The one who summoned him being who he was, Ten'yuu took only one of his attendants and followed the messenger.

Not only did Ten'yuu not know this messenger, but he was also taken on a route through the palace that he had never seen before. The layout of the Zaideran palace was complicated, and the same could be said for the Salutanian one. Ten'yuu had a good memory, and while he felt he would be able to make it back to this location from his own chambers, he felt he would have difficulty trying to go anywhere else.

Nevertheless, why had he been summoned? His thoughts raced as they walked, tinged with anxiety.

They took much longer to reach the king's office than it would have taken to walk straight from Ten'yuu's chambers, but eventually they arrived at their destination.

Even the room was one Ten'yuu had never entered before. There were knights posted on both sides of the door. They watched Ten'yuu and his attendant closely as they approached. However, even that scrutiny lasted for but a brief moment.

After identifying the new arrivals by their appearances, the knights announced to the occupants of the room that their guests had arrived.

Their group passed through the opened doors. The king was waiting for them from his place on a couch that could seat three people. Behind him stood the prime minister. The only other people in the room were Ten'yuu, his attendant, and a chamberlain.

The chamberlain poured tea for the king and Ten'yuu before immediately withdrawing from the room. Whatever the king had summoned the prince for, it appeared that he did not want anyone else to hear.

But with just the four of them in the room, Ten'yuu was on guard.

"Thank you for agreeing to honor my summons at this late hour," said the

king.

“But of course.”

“How has life at the academy been?”

“Very good. I greatly appreciate the kindness everyone has shown me.”

The king started with idle pleasantries just as they would have done in Zaidera. Ten’yuu answered his questions accordingly despite his avid desire to find out why he had been called.

Both the king and the prime minister wore calm expressions, so Ten’yuu couldn’t discern their intentions. No matter how he wanted the answers to his questions, he could not allow himself impatience. Instead, Ten’yuu focused, smiling faintly to conceal his inner feelings.

Before long, the topic of conversation moved from life at the academy to the research institutions that Ten’yuu had visited for his observations. The king expressed his gratitude to Ten’yuu for inspiring the people whom he had spoken with and helping them to advance their research. Ten’yuu thanked him in turn, saying he had learned a great deal as well. Yet a cold sweat ran down his back.

Everything Ten’yuu and his attendants had done at the places he went to observe had been reported to the king. Of course, Ten’yuu knew that he had been watched, given all of those Salutanian knights who acted as his guards. Anticipating their intentions, Ten’yuu had been careful in his conduct, but when he reflected on his recent behavior, all he could do was sigh. He highly doubted that he had managed to conceal his true reason for coming to the Kingdom of Salutania.

He was right. The king went on to mention how, out of all the institutes, the one Ten’yuu had been most frequently visiting of late was the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. When the king then asked if the prince was interested in herbology, Ten’yuu nodded and gave a somewhat evasive answer.

What was the king getting at? Ten’yuu anxiously examined the king’s demeanor—but then the conversation took an unexpected turn.

“Did you know that, a long time ago, our country was home to someone

known as the founder of modern alchemy?”

“No, unfortunately, I did not.”

“Well, it was said that she was an incredibly gifted alchemist and that she possessed skills that far exceed those of any alchemists living today.”

“Really?”

“Indeed. She could even devise medicines that cannot be replicated in the current era.”

The prime minister, who had been waiting behind the king for his cue, began to move. He picked up a tray that had been placed on top of a cabinet by the wall and brought it over to the table between the king and Ten’yuu.

Something that appeared to be a square box lay on the tray. However, it was covered in a scarlet cloth with a luminous sheen, so Ten’yuu couldn’t make out what was beneath it.

“What is this?” he asked.

“A potion said to have been made by that alchemist. It has been in the keeping of the royal family.”

At the mention of a potion, Ten’yuu’s eyebrow twitched. He mentally scolded himself for the slip, but though the king noticed, he didn’t demand that Ten’yuu speak.

The prime minister didn’t comment either. Instead, he reached for the cloth covering the tray. When he removed it, he revealed a box containing three potions.

“These are a type of potion called a panacea,” said the king.

“Panacea?” Ten’yuu asked. “Just what kind of effects does it have?” He could guess from the name, but he suppressed his eagerness.

The king gave him the answer he expected. “It is said that one of these can cure any abnormal status effect.”

“What exactly does that mean?”

“Just as I said. These potions can apparently cure any poison, any paralysis,

any disease—anything, no matter the symptoms.”

Upon hearing the king’s explanation, Ten’yuu instantly understood why he had been summoned here under cover of night, away from prying eyes. It made all the sense in the world that a potion made with a long-lost technique would have been hidden by the royal family. Furthermore, this potion was what Ten’yuu had been searching for all this time.

Ten’yuu stared at the bottles of panacea in disbelief. His mind began to whirl, unsure of what kind of response was most correct in this situation.



From the fact that the king had brought these out for him to see, he gathered that the kingdom knew the reason for his journey to Salutania. He wasn't sure how they had figured it out, but he filed that away to mull over later.

Right now, Ten'yuu had to discern *why* the king was showing him the panaceas. It was wishful thinking, but he hoped beyond all hope that they would give one to him. However, even if they did, the Kingdom of Salutania would no doubt demand a terribly high price in exchange. Even if they didn't demand compensation now, it would be a heavy debt to repay in the future.

If Ten'yuu's choices had concerned only himself, he would have accepted such a debt without blinking. But as a representative of Zaidera, it was a different story.

As Ten'yuu was lost in thought, the king spoke: "You may have these."

Upon hearing these enticing words, Ten'yuu slowly raised his gaze. "I..."

"These are what you were looking for, correct?"

Ten'yuu's heart was torn between disbelief and desire for the panaceas. He carefully controlled his face as he replied, "I cannot accept these."

"Why not?"

"Because I have nothing of equal value to offer in exchange." Ten'yuu wore a stiff look as he refused.

The king gave him a crooked smile, as if he had been planning something. "I myself rule a whole country. I will not say that I do not require any kind of compensation. That said, I won't say that I require instant repayment."

"Your Majesty..."

"I shall consider this an investment, one that I will have repaid sometime in the future."

Ten'yuu was flummoxed as to how to respond until the prime minister began an explanation, as if Ten'yuu had been pressing him for an answer.

They had a reason for not demanding immediate payment. Unlike other organic matter, potions did not decay. It was said that so long as they were

stored properly, their effects would last for about one hundred years. However, it had already been over a century since these potions had been brewed. Naturally, they had been appropriately stored, since they had been in the custody of the royal family, but it was possible that they wouldn't have the same effects as they had upon their creation. Therefore, there was at best a fifty percent chance that they would cure Ten'yuu's mother of her ailment. That was why they didn't mind deferring compensation until the potions' potency had been confirmed.

Just as Ten'yuu had predicted, the king and prime minister already knew why he wanted the panacea. What he didn't know was that Johan, the head of the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, had informed them of it, and that Sei had been the one who had made the panaceas. The potions before Ten'yuu had only just been brewed. Their ability to cure any status abnormality or illness had already been verified as well. Typically, anything Sei created using her Saintly powers would have been kept a state secret. The only reason the king was giving them to Ten'yuu was because Sei had specifically wanted them to go to the prince.

The king couldn't reveal any of this; he didn't want Ten'yuu to know of the Saint's powers. That was why he claimed the Great Alchemist had been the one to create the panaceas and furthermore lied about how long ago they had been brewed.

As a result, though the king would be obliged to hand them over without demanding compensation, he and his prime minister decided to go through with it anyway.

They had watched how Ten'yuu conducted himself since coming to stay in their country and had concluded that he was an honest sort. He hadn't come in pursuit of his own self-interests. Therefore they believed that Ten'yuu would repay them accordingly in due time. This would prove beneficial for the nation as well.

And if it turned out to be a bad deal, well, they could just brush it under the rug.

At least, that was their conclusion.

After hearing the prime minister's explanation, Ten'yuu thought it over for a moment before coming to his own conclusion. "Very well. I shall humbly accept."

Still sitting, he bowed deeply to show his gratitude. The king nodded with a regal air.

Ten'yuu acted swiftly after this audience with the king. Publicly, he claimed that he had received a letter that his mother's condition had taken a turn for the worse and prepared to return to Zaidera. He left the Kingdom of Salutania in a hurry and went straight to his mother's side as soon as he arrived in Zaidera.

Fortunately, his mother's condition had remained stable and unchanged while he was away. She was surprised to see him return so suddenly, and mere moments after she greeted him, he gave her the panacea.

Ten'yuu was in such a rush because he didn't want anyone who learned of the panacea to steal it. He had brought his closest attendant with him to the meeting with the King of Salutania, and he didn't think that attendant would tell anyone else about it. However, there were surely many people who suspected something interesting had happened after Ten'yuu ended his term of study abroad and returned to Zaidera with such speed. The emperor was doubtless among them.

When the emperor asked why his son had ended his time abroad so early, the powerless Ten'yuu would have had no choice but to answer honestly. Then he'd likely need to hand over all the remaining panaceas to the emperor. If that were to happen, he knew that the potions would not be returned to him. Ten'yuu could well imagine countless people who would come up with any excuse to not return them to him.

So, he wanted to give a panacea to his mother before that happened, even if it only had a fifty-fifty chance of working. If asked, he could just tell the emperor that he had wanted to verify the potions' effects before presenting them to him.

Moreover, the king had given him three potions. One would be more than

enough to pass on to the emperor.

Ten'yuu had in fact already decided to admit that he had hurried back so abruptly because he had acquired the panaceas. He had no intentions of keeping them all to himself.

Ten'yuu's mother stared at the medicine that her son had offered her; he was so unusually agitated.

The prince had given his mother countless medicines to try over the years. She knew how hard he had worked to acquire them and that they weren't cheap. How hard had her son worked to get his hands on this one? How heartbroken would he be if this too wound up useless?

Ten'yuu tried not to let it show, but his mother knew that he often brooded in private. He had clearly felt such great disappointment every time a potion hadn't worked, after all of the troubles he had gone through to get them.

With those thoughts in mind, she was reluctant to agree to take this one right away. At her hesitation, Ten'yuu begged her to drink it and told her the story of how he had gotten his hands on it.

Of course, not all of it was good news. He relayed the prime minister's explanation—that the panaceas were old and that there was only a fifty percent chance that they would still work as intended. He made no effort to conceal this fact precisely so that his mother wouldn't worry if nothing happened.

After Ten'yuu finished speaking, his mother still thought it over for a moment before agreeing to drink it. It was beyond her strength to sit up on her own or even speak articulately at this point, so she conveyed this with a slight nod.

A court attendant, similar to a lady's maid in Salutania, helped support Ten'yuu's mother so she could sit up. Then Ten'yuu brought the bottle to her lips and tipped it slowly to let her swallow.

At a glance, there were no dramatic changes. But his mother felt something within her.

Once she was done drinking the potion, she opened her eyes wide and began to weep.

The prince felt himself panic, but then, in a clear voice, his mother said his name. “Ten’yuu.”

That told him everything he needed to know. The panacea had worked as promised.

Mother and son embraced in joyous celebration. Their long years of hardship were over. As Ten’yuu hugged her, happy tears fell down his cheeks as well.

After that, things proceeded just as Ten’yuu had anticipated they would. He and the doctor who had been treating his mother observed the progress of her recovery. Upon confirming that her illness had been completely cured, Ten’yuu presented the remaining panaceas to the emperor.

The fact that Ten’yuu’s bedridden mother had recovered to the point that she could now sit in a chair served as verification of the panacea’s effects. Her present condition was utterly unlike it had been before, when she had gradually lost her ability to engage in even the most ordinary of daily activities.

Ten’yuu explained that he had used the panacea on his mother before presenting it to the emperor, just as he had originally planned. However, he made it seem as if the events leading up to his acquisition of the panaceas in the capital of the Kingdom of Salutania had been mere coincidence.

Specifically, he made it sound like he had come by them just as he had all the medicines he tried before. Ten’yuu went to these efforts because he feared that if it became public knowledge that the Salutanian king himself had given him such a precious treasure, it would only cause trouble for the king.

Now that Ten’yuu’s mother’s illness had been cured, he was in the king of Salutania’s debt. Ten’yuu now considered the king more important in his personal cosmology than anyone in the Zaidaran palace, even the emperor, and he wanted to avoid doing anything that would cause trouble for someone to whom he was so deeply beholden.

Typically, it wouldn’t have been unusual for Ten’yuu to be thoroughly questioned about these events, but the emperor took his son’s words at face value. The truth was that the emperor had been deeply concerned about

Ten'yuu and his mother. However, due to political obligations, he had been unable to support them in any official capacity, and for that, guilt had gnawed at him. Therefore, the emperor neglected to interrogate Ten'yuu any further, even though he found the explanation unsatisfactory. Instead, he only thanked the prince for returning with the panaceas.

And so, Ten'yuu's long search for a cure had come to an end.

Act 2:

High Society

SEVERAL DAYS after my tea party with Liz, Johan summoned me in the middle of the workday. I went to his office to find him sitting at his desk with his arms crossed and head hanging.

“Uh, you called for me?”

“Oh, right. Well, go on, sit down.”

At his urging, I sat in one of the facing sofas and Johan stood from his chair. As he came toward me, he picked up a letter from his desk.

The moment I laid eyes on it, I recalled my conversation with Liz the other day and came down with a bad feeling.

Johan took his seat on the sofa and placed the letter in front of me. The seal was broken. He had undoubtedly already read it.

Bad feelings were never wrong. My expression was stiff as I said, “Um, what’s this?”

Johan answered exactly as I’d feared he would. “An invitation.”

“Is that so?” I asked. *Oh no.*

I was mentally hollering, and it seemed my psychological state was evident on my face, because Johan smiled awkwardly as he told me the whole story.

After my debut, the nobility had determined that this meant that the Saint was now, at long last, available to participate in social events. Those who had concluded this did the next logical thing: sent invitations to my abode.

The palace had been acting as my point of contact, and apparently, they had received mountains of invitations for tea parties and evening soirées alike, all addressed to the Saint.

“There were that many?”

“Quite. I hear that over half the noble houses have sent you invitations.”

Huh. Over half of them? That means pretty much every house that I have yet to meet during expeditions, then, doesn't it?

Seeing Johan speaking with a dead, faraway look in his eyes only brought me down straight into the same melancholy.

All that aside, he had put just one invitation in front of me. When I inquired further, I learned it was because I was only getting invitations that had passed the palace's scrutiny.

The palace had received a considerable number of invitations and opened every single one of them. In case you were wondering, I didn't really mind that they were reading these letters, even if they were addressed to me.

At present, private letters to me were delivered to the institute. Meanwhile, the majority of those letters sent to the palace were invitations to social events. I wouldn't have been too concerned if anyone read my private letters anyway—I rarely received them in the first place.

In fact, the only letters I did get were from Corinna in Klausner's Domain and reports about cosmetic sales from my company. Besides that, I had received a few letters of thanks from the lords of domains in the countryside for taking care of their monster problems.

Not to mention, it would have been a huge pain to vet the identities of all the invitation senders and determine whether I ought to go to their events. I had learned about the noble houses of the kingdom from the classes I took at the palace, but I still didn't know enough to immediately determine anyone's affiliated faction, or the related power dynamics, politics, and all that stuff. I was especially in the dark when it came to houses with whom I hadn't yet associated.

Therefore, I was quite grateful to the palace for filtering my invitations. They even declined on my behalf.

"But this is the only invitation that has been sent here," I said.

"Indeed. And because of that, it means that you have to attend."

"Really? I thought I could decline if I wanted."

“You can if you really want to. But I personally think you should accept this one.”

Johan usually respected my wishes, so it was unusual to hear him encouraging me to go. I frowned, which prompted him to urge me to look at the back of the envelope.

I turned it over to find it had been sealed with a familiar crest.

“It’s from the house that leads the largest political faction among the officials and bureaucrats of the palace. Normally, it’s not an invitation anyone could decline.”

“I remember. I learned about them in my classes.”

“The fact that the palace sent it here means that even they think you should become better acquainted with them.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Even if you decline now, they’re sure to send another invitation before long. You should just accept.”

Johan was right. If they were going to wind up sending more invitations anyway, then I figured I ought to just say yes to this one. Besides, I had no real reason to decline, and Johan agreed with the palace’s decision too.

Salutania’s political factions were divided in various ways. Some of them had come together because certain houses had produced a number of talented people for particular occupations. Based on the current organization, the houses I had become acquainted with were largely affiliated with the military spheres of the kingdom. There was a reason for this: Most of the nobles I’d met were from the knightly orders and the Royal Magi Assembly. We’d gotten to know each other when I accompanied them on monster-slaying expeditions.

On the flip side, outside of expeditions, I mostly stayed cooped up in the institute, so I didn’t know that many palace officials.

When you took my position into account, this political imbalance in my personal life likely posed a problem. I could only surmise that they were telling me to use this opportunity to fix it.

“Very well. I’ll accept this invitation, then.”

“You’re not going to read it first?”

“Oh, right.” I had accidentally answered without taking a look at it first.

When I reviewed the contents of the envelope, I learned that I had been invited to an afternoon tea party. If it was in step with Salutanian etiquette, then I could assume it would only be attended by women.

The problem lay in *who* had sent this invitation. I was already acquainted with someone from this house, but the invitation had come from someone else in her family.

What did this mean? I thought about it, but I couldn’t come up with a reason for why I had been invited by specifically this woman. So, not gonna lie, I gave up on trying to figure it out pretty quickly.

“Is there anything you need?” Johan asked. “A dress code you’ll need to adhere to?”

“There doesn’t appear to be. It’s just a regular afternoon tea party.”

“All right, then. I’ll go ahead and tell the palace that you’ll be attending.”

“Thank you.”

The palace would also accept on my behalf. I was quite grateful for this, since there were a boatload of rules for writing replies to letters as well.

Thus, I accepted Johan’s offer and let the palace take care of what needed to be done next.

Two weeks later, I went to the tea party I had been invited to.

For the party, I wore a white dress patterned with small flowers. White frills and blue ribbons were sewn into the neckline and cuffs, while my hat, gloves, and other accessories matched the dress.

The palace maids had picked my attire for the day. I had studied dress code in high society, but I knew the maids would never lead me astray, so I left it all up to them. They always seemed so happy to put together my outfits, which made

me glad that I did.

I swear I didn't let them design it because I was afraid of making a bad choice and just wanted to skip out on doing it—honest!

Even so, not having to rack my brains figuring out my outfit didn't mean I didn't leave the whole ordeal exhausted. Getting ready took a lot of stamina.

I struggled through my morning routine, and by the time I stepped into the coach, I was already drained of all my emotional energy. And the main event hadn't even begun! I drooped listlessly on the seat, hoping to recover myself by the time we arrived.

A little later, the coach stopped in front of a manor so fancy that one might have assumed it was a royal villa. It wasn't just because it was three stories high—it was expansive horizontally as well. I was willing to bet it was at least as long as it was wide and tall.

This is the manor where the house that commands the strongest bureaucratic faction lives?

I had heard that ordinarily the noble manors within the capital were smaller than the estates they kept back in their domains. I couldn't imagine a manor being bigger than *this*. It was simply that astronomically large.

I watched as someone opened the doors of the coach, and after a short pause, I stepped outside using someone's hand for assistance.

People were lined up in front of the entrance to the manor. I couldn't help but want to flinch back from the gravity of seeing so many people waiting.

I assumed the individuals lined up from left to right were the manor's servants. At the center of their line stood an overwhelmingly beautiful woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, and beside her, a pretty girl who had very much been made in her image.

"Welcome, Lady Saint." The woman greeted me with a curtsy.



The girl and servants simultaneously curtsied or bowed as well.

I smiled but took care to make sure it didn't look forced or awkward. I returned their greetings wearing the graceful expression that I had perfected during my classes.

"I am most delighted to make your acquaintance. I am Angelica Ashley."

"And I am Sei Takanashi. Thank you so much for inviting me here today."

That's right, I had been invited for tea by Liz's family at Marquis Ashley's estate. Liz's mother, Marchioness Ashley, was the host. In this country without a queen, she was the highest-ranking woman of power after the Saint.

Internally, I felt profoundly lower-middle class despite the marchioness's incredibly polite greeting as she bowed her head to me. It was unspeakably distressing to see so many people showing this much reverence toward me, including a woman of her stature. As such, I asked them to raise their heads the second after I greeted them.

Once everyone had their heads raised again, including the servants, the next to speak was the beautiful girl who knew my disposition all too well. "I am so very glad that I could at last invite you to our home."

"And I am glad to have been invited." I smiled back at Liz.

With that, we finished our greetings, and Marchioness Ashley showed me into the manor.

I had passed the first checkpoint! But my relief lasted for only a brief moment. It wouldn't be long before I had to repeat the same song and dance with everyone else who was attending this event.

Marchioness Ashley led us to a room on the first floor, one side of which was just one big window. The white walls were adorned with golden decorations, and together with the curtains and furniture upholstered with yellow cloth, the atmosphere was terribly refined. The soft rays of the early afternoon sun shone through the window, filling the room with brightness.

Through the window, I could see a beautiful garden bursting with an abundance of multicolored flowers in full bloom. The beauties found in the room were just as brightly colored as the ones outside. Several women who looked to be about my age were dressed in gowns in soft pastel hues. They appeared to have already decided their seats and were all standing around a circular table in front of their chairs.

As soon as I set foot in the room, the women curtsied in unison. Their perfectly coordinated greeting made me nearly cry out in admiration. I somehow managed to suppress the urge and asked them to raise their heads. They then relaxed their posture, also in unison.

Did they practice or something? They couldn't have, right? I thought to myself as I found my way to the seat that it was suggested I take.

"Lady Sei, please allow me to introduce you to my friends."

"Thank you."

After we took our seats, Marchioness Ashley, who was seated to my right, introduced me to the ladies. I had assumed she would just go around the table counterclockwise, but I was wrong: She introduced them in order of rank as was proper. You know, noble stuff.

As I was introduced to them, I realized I was mistaken in my assumption that these were unwed noble ladies. It turned out that every one of them was already married, which I could surmise from the titles with which they were introduced.

Since the marriageable age in this world was far younger than it was in modern-day Japan, it seemed likely that pretty much every noble lady my age was already hitched. Not to mention, even though they looked about the same age as me, there was also the chance that they were actually older.

After introductions were finished, the maids began placing tea and all kinds of confections on the table. There was a wondrous spread of baked sweets, and they all looked so delicious that I had difficulty picking between them. The women evidently felt similarly and commented on how scrumptious they appeared.

There were a number of rare confections, as one might expect to find at the house of a marquis. They must have been made by some famous confectioner because one lady excitedly asked if they were from such-and-such shop. The marchioness nodded with a smile.

I had heard as much from my classes on etiquette, but these noble ladies really were on top of the latest trends.

After some conversation about the confections, talk naturally turned toward the tableware and vases that decorated the room.

It was proper form to compliment the arrangements in the venue during tea parties. I had also learned this during my classes and practiced it during tea parties with Liz, but I realized that I still had much to learn as I listened to the others putting these rules into practice.

How should I describe it? It was like a difference in experience levels. To be fair, young noble ladies participated in tea parties before they were considered adults, so it was only natural that they were standing on the other side of a wide gap between us in terms of pure familiarity with the practice.

“These roses must have come from where I think they’re from, mustn’t they?”

“Quite, you are correct. We had them brought special since Lady Takanashi has joined us today.”

“How gracious of you!”

At Marchioness Ashley’s words, everyone got excited all at once.

I didn’t really understand what was going on, so Liz, who was sitting next to me, quietly explained that the roses on display were special and were ordinarily not allowed to be picked. They were usually only used for decorating during the birthday celebrations of the marquis and marchioness, or for special parties. They were, in fact, quite famous and known as “the Ashley Roses.”

I see now.

The roses were a dark crimson. I had seen the sort often in Japan, but I had never seen such a color since coming to this world. Even the palace only

decorated with white or pink roses.

As it turned out, roses were one of the special exports from Marquis Ashley's domain. An ancestor of theirs had devoted herself to selectively cultivating them, and before long, she had grown such a great variety of roses that they had become a local specialty. This was why not only the vases but even the tableware depicted roses.

At first, I hadn't realized why everyone was reacting the way they were, but now that I had, it would surely be only proper to thank them for putting something so special on display for me.

"Thank you for granting me such an honor." I smiled as I conveyed my gratitude.

The marchioness smiled back. "I am happy to hear that they please you."

Perhaps because roses were a special export of Marquis Ashley's domain, the conversation then turned to the products from everyone's domains. Even among regions where dairy farming was common, each region had come up with their own unique products. This fact had been no different in my original world. For example, the word "cheese" actually implied a wide spectrum of different food items.

As I listened to their conversations, I got the impression that ingredients were a common topic of discussion. During our expeditions, I had been told quite frequently about food-related local specialties.

Maybe it was because it was well known among palace officials that I'd cooked all kinds of meals? Or maybe they were purposefully picking topics they thought I would be able to participate in.

As we chatted, I became especially interested in the local specialty from Marchioness Barchet's domain.

Marchioness Barchet sat to the right of Marchioness Ashley. Her hair was a color that would never be found naturally in my original world. If I had to describe it, it was a minty blonde? It shone with a light green color, and her eyes were blue. She was so pretty that if someone had told me she was a fairy, I would have believed it.

“You said that you grow saffron in your domain, Lady Barchet? Like the spice?” The saffron I was familiar with was considered such. However, she described it differently.

“My apologies. It is not a spice but an herb.”

An herb. A type of herb, huh? I was pretty sure I had heard of saffron being used as a medicine back in my old world.

I asked the apologetic marchioness more questions and learned that Barchet saffron did indeed sound like the same plant I was familiar with. When I told her this, she cheered right up.

“By spice, do you mean that you can use it in cooking as well?” she asked.

“Yes. We used it often in my birthplace, usually in meals with rice. And soups as well.”

Another lady then asked, “Meals with rice? You mean that grain that arrived from Zaidera just recently?”

“Yes. I’m surprised you know of it.”

We regularly had meals with rice served at the dining hall at the institute, but I hadn’t yet heard of it being eaten anywhere else. I had thought that not many people knew of it, since Salutania had only just begun trading with Zaidera within the past few years.

Where in the world had they heard about rice, then? From some house involved with diplomacy? At any rate, I was feeling impressed at how quickly information could fly when someone then explained it: Her brothers were members of the Royal Magi Assembly.

Ah, I get it now. That makes total sense.

Everyone in the Royal Magi Assembly knew how the grand magus had become obsessed with rice-based meals.

“I heard that Grand Magus Drewes first heard of rice from the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora—where you work, yes?”

“I heard that the institute’s dining hall serves meals of your own invention, Lady Sei.”

“I didn’t actually invent them. I only recreate the kinds of food we ate in my hometown.”

“Is that so?”

“Are there even more new meals out there in the world—beyond those served with rice?”

“And the researchers at your research institute always get to eat them? I’m so envious.”

While everyone around me continued chattering about food, I was taken aback. *Th-they’re all so well informed. I suppose that what I was taught was true. Tea parties are actually battlegrounds where skirmishes of information are fought.*

As I was watching everyone, Marchioness Ashley asked me, “Will you not host your own tea party sometime?”

“Huh? What do you mean?” I was confused by the sudden change of topic, but then Liz expanded on what her mother was getting at.

“I’m sure a tea party hosted by you would serve all manner of unusual foods.”

Then I understood. Liz was probably right. I likely *would* serve something from Japan if I were to host a tea party—which would mean that everyone I invited would get to eat the same kind of food that we served at the research institute. Marchioness Ashley was likely asking because she wanted to give all these ladies an opportunity to do so.

At least, that was the conclusion I came to when I pondered the ulterior motive underlying her words.

“I suppose? But I’m pretty sure it would all be things you’ve tried before, Liz.”

“I doubt that. From what I’ve heard, you serve all sorts of food I have yet to sample.”

“From what you’ve heard? You don’t mean the sweets?”

“Indeed. Nothing I’ve heard about on the Research Institute of Medicinal

Flora's menu is something I've had the pleasure of trying."

I had served Liz a dessert from my world before—one I had given the chefs the recipe for before a tea party. Besides that, I had pretty much only served her sandwiches.

When I thought of tea parties, the image of afternoon tea always sprang to mind. As such, the only other thing I could imagine serving at a tea party was quiche.

However, it seemed that Liz specifically wanted to try the sort of things our dining hall served. In that case, I got the feeling that it would be better to host a dinner party instead. The only problem with this idea was that Liz wouldn't be able to join us at such an event.

Liz was a minor, so she wasn't permitted to participate in social events that took place after sundown. It might have been all right if it were a gathering just for her relatives, but that wasn't what we were discussing. And if I was going to host an event, then I wanted it to be one that Liz could attend.

"Is something the matter, Lady Sei?" Marchioness Ashley asked.

"I'm sorry, no. I was just caught up in thinking."

"About what, might I ask?"

"What sort of event to host if I were going to host something. If eating would be the focus, then perhaps something during the day?"

At the sound of me speaking of hosting an event in a positive light, the other ladies became instantly excited.

As I tried to put my own thoughts in order, I decided to take the opportunity to ask them if they had any requests. The ladies had no objections to the event being held during the day. On the other hand, one mentioned that men wouldn't be as able to participate, as daytime events were mainly held by women for women in the Kingdom of Salutania. If I wanted to invite men as well, then I would have to think it over a bit. Furthermore, while they were receptive to the idea of eating being the focus, it would require some degree of creativity to pull off.

My words had everyone imagining a dinner party and talking about what kinds of food would be served. They brought up all sorts of dishes, but they also named ones from all sorts of cuisines, not limiting themselves to Western, Chinese, or Japanese. If I devised a list of courses to serve at a banquet, then the variety would probably need to be fairly uniform.

Moreover, given the amount of food required to compose a single serving, then the limit would be two or three dishes at most. That meant that I wouldn't be able to fulfill every single one of their requests—just a few of them. However, I also doubted I would be able to host parties very frequently, so I wanted to grant their requests as best as I could.

Maybe I could serve smaller portions of every dish and increase the number of total dishes that way? Hmm, but even that approach has its limits. In that case, maybe I should host a buffet? Yeah, that might work. That way I could serve all sorts of dishes and people could take as much or as little as they wanted of each.

If they could pick whatever food they liked, I wouldn't have to worry about everyone's preferences either. Salutanians were already accustomed to buffets at parties anyway, so everyone would be used to that system too.

Yeah, that might work.

"Did you come up with something?" Liz asked, sensing that I had finished thinking it through.

"Yes. I was thinking it might be a good idea to host a party with a buffet. That way I could serve all sorts of food, and everyone could focus on those they found most interesting."

"I think that's a wonderful idea. Although I fear that socializing might become the focus and the food would come second."

In other words, while she agreed that a buffet was a good idea in principle, she feared that the setting wouldn't quite fit the goals I had set out, given people's assumptions about how buffets worked. They were mainly offered during balls in Salutania. They would be located in a lounge away from the ballroom and would primarily serve finger foods. As Liz noted, people hardly actually ate during balls because balls were for socializing. It was probably

something like prioritizing work over eating.

“Then maybe we should say that it’s a party for food from the outset?”

“Ah, describing it as a party where attendees can get a chance to enjoy the Lady Saint’s meals just might work.”

“And then...”

Liz seemed to agree with this idea. I thought it would be a good idea to call the party something that would evoke what Liz described. But Liz’s expression was urging me to come up with something even better.

Was there a way to make eating the food *be* the work? Parties were meant to be opportunities to see people and gather information, then spread it. If I could somehow connect that with eating, then everyone would indeed focus on the food.

As soon as I thought of that, I suddenly remembered what these ladies had been talking about before: local specialties.

Maybe the food could be made using special products from each region! It would work as good advertisement for products that weren’t already relatively well known, and it would maybe even lead to innovations where those products were used in new ways.

For example, saffron, which we had been discussing before. Saffron was recognized as an herb in Salutania, but people didn’t know it could be used as a spice as well.

“Then how about an event that features food made using the local specialty products from each region? It could be good advertising.”

I was about to explain myself a little further—that maybe then the attendees would focus on the food—but I stopped. I had said that out loud because I wanted to hear Liz’s opinion, but the reaction from the table told me all I needed to know as to whether this was, in fact, a good idea.

The ladies all appeared *quite* receptive. They were immediately abuzz.

“Meals cooked by Lady Sei using our specialty exports? I would simply love to give that a try!”

“Are you already using our local products in your dining hall?”

“How about something with pork? The pork from my domain is known to be delicious.”

“Goodness, Lady Jerusalem! Do try not to steal ahead of the rest of us. But if we’re discussing products, then my house is renowned for its cheese—”

I was overwhelmed by how feverishly they all pushed their products on me. No sooner had one gotten the ball rolling than the other ladies came at me in turn, asking if I could use products from their domains.

When I thought about it, both during this tea party and when I had gone traveling during expeditions, people were always telling me all about the food and ingredients their domains were known for. I was beginning to suspect that those had all been tacit presentations to the Saint.

I found myself at a loss, unable to answer their questions. Marchioness Ashley took pity on me and reined them in.

To be clear, all she had said was, “Ladies, please, calm yourselves.” Her way of speaking was quiet, but her voice traveled well and in the blink of an eye. The women instantly settled back down. She truly was a voice of authority among them.

From there, the topic of discussion changed course to what was in fashion in the capital of late. Before I knew it, that enjoyable time was over, and it was time to call the party to a close.

Act 3:

The Food Festival

ONE WEEK AFTER Marchioness Ashley's tea party, it was decided that I would host my own event.

Perhaps someone else would have warned me that I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I myself wasn't sure how any of it had happened. Or at least, that's what I would like to claim. In truth, I knew exactly how this had all come together, because the king and the prime minister summoned me to explain.

It went without saying that Marchioness Ashley was the instigator behind it all. After the tea party, she had spoken with her husband about the discussions that day. When she expressed her surprise at how receptive I had been to the idea of creating my own social event, the marquis immediately went to speak with the king about me hosting a party.

Capable men are quick to strike when they see an opportunity, after all. I was a bit amazed by his alacrity, all the same.

Having heard the marquis's request, the king and prime minister decided to leverage it to their advantage. They would make this a chance for the nobles who were frustrated by the lack of opportunities to meet the Saint to make her acquaintance and thus resolve their discontent.

The nobility had been sending a deluge of invitations to the Saint in hopes of making her acquaintance all this time. The king and prime minister determined that it would be less stressful for me to host my own party instead of responding to everyone else's invitations.

I agreed. I believed that by inviting the nobility to my own parties, I would have to deal with them less frequently than I would if I went to theirs.

To be clear, I wouldn't have been nearly so overwhelmed if I could have just been a wallflower at any ball I was invited to. But things never could be that easy. Any time I went to one, people would inevitably approach me to keep up

acquaintances with the Saint, and there would surely be a line of people wanting to ask me for a dance. All through the party, that line would never wane. Just imagining it distressed me beyond belief.

Therefore, when I considered whether accepting invitations or hosting my own party would be more painful, I didn't even have to think about it—especially since figuring out what kind of event to host had honestly been kind of fun. I had a feeling that preparation would be a lot of work, but I was sure it would be worth it.

So, when the king and prime minister asked if I would be interested in hosting an event, I agreed. Thankfully, they gave me their complete support the whole way through, so I wasn't on my own for this. The palace provided everything I physically required—the venue, assistants, and even ingredients for the meal.

For the venue, I was offered the use of a courtyard in the palace, and for the assistance, I was able to borrow the servants, maids, and chefs who worked at the palace. If I needed any particular ingredients, all I had to do was ask an official and he would make the arrangements for me.

The most I personally had to do was come up with the ideas. Even with that, I sorted it all out during discussions with the officials, so it was a great deal less stressful than I initially anticipated.

Except, well, they expanded the scale of the party a bit beyond my original expectations. Apparently, what I had first had in mind would be too intimate. According to the official helping me, my starting plan would have accommodated less than half the people who were interested in attending, which would have meant hosting yet another party at a later date. I didn't want to host one event after another, so I took the official's assessment into consideration and opted for one bigger shindig.

A busy half month of preparations passed until the day of the party finally arrived.

Since I was hosting, I stayed at the palace the night before. The party began just before noon, so we started getting ready before daybreak.

By this, I mean I had to get dressed up. My usual maids took care of the majority of that, so though I was half-asleep throughout the process, that

wasn't really a problem.

However, the maids couldn't afford to slack off. They woke up earlier than me, got themselves dressed for the day, and *then* got things ready for *me* to get dressed. I was full of utter admiration for everyone's dedication to their duties.

There were also a number of people working hard to get the venue ready from before the break of dawn.

I was sure that, since I was hosting a party that was a bit different from the usual soirées held at the palace, they would have some trouble. Nevertheless, somehow, everything was set up with no major problems along the way. It all came down to the various people I'd met with to plan it, as well as their hard work.

"It looks like they got everything set up okay," I said.

"Yes," said my companion. "And it looks like they're just about done setting out all of the food."

"Mm-hmm. It all smells great."

After getting dressed, I arrived at the venue early to do a final check. Accompanying me was Prince Rayne. He was essentially the supervisor for all matters concerning the Saint and was one of the people who had put in a lot of the elbow grease to get this party up to snuff.

At first, I had considered him my assistant, but the fact was that he had played a central role in managing the whole thing. The way it ended up working out was that I would give him a request, and then he and his close associates would deliver the appropriate instructions to the appropriate departments.

Thanks to Prince Rayne and his associates acting as my intermediaries, party prep had wound up being relatively easy. As such, I considered him a central figure for this event, but Prince Rayne insisted he had merely helped out here and there.

I felt awful about that, since he had done most of the work. But when I said this, he smiled and told me, "This is just what I need to learn how to do for the future."



He was so competent; it was hard to believe he was only fifteen years old. Actually, both he and Liz were quite mature for their age. Was it possibly because of how they had been taught since they were very young?

Prince Rayne's responsibility didn't end at making the arrangements for the party. He was also acting as my escort for the event, which was why he was dressed quite handsomely as he stood beside me in the hall. Apparently, his outfit was appropriate for afternoon parties; he was less decorated than he would have been for an evening event.

"I've never been to this kind of party before. It feels like I can't keep still," Prince Rayne said.

"Are you feeling nervous?"

"Yes, but I'm also looking forward to this. This is what your parties are like back in Japan, yes?"

"Uh, I wouldn't say they're *exactly* like this. This is more like a food festival, if anything."

"A festival? You mean like a harvest festival?"

"Yes, that. Although I would say that our party is more specifically about enjoying the meal."

Prince Rayne surveyed the venue looking somewhat excited as I explained the initial concept for the party again.

The prince was right that I had based my concept for this event on a certain sort of event in Japan—food festivals, in particular, which were held outdoors.

Our venue was in a section of the palace gardens that was typically an open space with nothing regularly kept within it. Tables, chairs, and sun parasols had been arranged in the center, with countless tents erected around the perimeter.

Well, I called them tents, but they were more specifically canopy tents. They were comprised of four long poles holding up a white cloth canopy, and none of them had walls. The weather was lovely that day, so the white of the tents and parasols stood out against the green grass and made it all look extremely

pretty.

Inside each of the tents was a kitchen and table for setting plates on as a counter. The food would be finished cooking on-site. The mise en place for each meal—such as chopping up ingredients and the like—had been done in the palace kitchens first, as per usual.

I had decided on this format for the party because I thought it might be good entertainment for the nobles to watch the chefs at work, since they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do so. I had also arranged it so that the nobles would have to go to the tents themselves to get their food.

However, there had been a bit of a dispute about this. Someone had noted a worry over whether this event would be completely safe. It seemed some of the nobility always found something to complain about, though fortunately this complaint wasn't especially loud.

Ultimately, we had to designate special seats to ensure the safety of important persons such as the king and prime minister. Therefore, the king wouldn't be eating at the center table but taking his meal in a different section. In other words, we had to have a VIP area.

Their area had its own tents and places for plating food, but it also had chamberlains on standby. The VIP guests would tell the chamberlains what they wanted to eat, and the chamberlains would go fetch the dishes.

This section also had taste testers to check for poison. Furthermore, we had mages on the premises who could use magic to heal any toxins or related effects. I happened to be one of them.

"Everything seems all set here, so perhaps we should start heading to the entrance?" Prince Rayne suggested after we finished our tour of the venue.

"Good idea."

We had the important job of greeting the guests and thanking them for coming. This would be my main duty for the day.

At parties organized by the royal family, it was customary for the host to appear after everyone else. However, we decided that I would greet the guests at the door like a typical noble would for one of their own events. Once

greetings were seen to, guests would select and enjoy their food. This was to ensure that eating would remain the main focus of the party. I had decided to do this because I was afraid that if I made my entrance after everyone else, the focus would turn to me instead.

Moreover, I wasn't yet acquainted with two-thirds of the people who would be attending. In other words, these were the people who had thus far been unable to secure a chance to meet the Saint. I imagined that they would be fired up at the prospect of meeting me, especially those who likely wouldn't get a chance to see me again anytime soon.

I anticipated that initial conversations with these people would run long, so I was hoping to curtail that behavior by greeting them at the door. I wanted to take advantage of, you know, that feeling of mental pressure to hurry up and finish when you know other people are waiting on you. Besides, if I could bring up that other people were waiting, I'd have an easier time getting them to move along.

Thinking about the oncoming flurry of meeting new people is a bit depressing... But I think I can do it? I tried to give myself a mental pep talk as Prince Rayne and I headed to the entrance together.

As soon as it was time for the party to begin, guests came in one after another. The moment they spotted Prince Rayne and I waiting by the entrance, they made a beeline toward us with amiable smiles on their faces. I dredged up the memory of my lessons and greeted them with a smile in turn.

The palace had put together the guest list for this event, so many of the arrivals were people who I was meeting for the very first time. I had asked the palace to take care of the list because I had felt stymied and ill-equipped to handle it myself.

Yes, one of the reasons I was hosting this event was to give people whom I would not ordinarily ever meet the chance to become acquainted with me. Even so, it wasn't like the guests could be picked at random. There were political concerns at play, so it was vital to take various power dynamics into consideration.

I had learned a bit about this during my lessons, but not nearly enough to be able to confidently select a large number of people to invite while keeping all that in mind. On top of that, this party wasn't an extension of my lessons or practice. I was going to be performing without rehearsal, so to speak, and if I made any mistakes, there would be consequences. Therefore, I had determined that it would be best to ask other people to do what I couldn't and so asked the palace to curate the list in my stead.

That being said, I did have some acquaintances in attendance, the very first of these being Marquis Ashley's family. In addition to the marchioness and Liz, the marquis himself had also come, as well as Liz's older brother, Viscount Ashley, and his wife.

Liz was pretty, so I had predicted this, but everyone in her family was drop-dead gorgeous. I wasn't sure if it was just my imagination or whether they actually radiated halos of light.

Although this was my friend's family, I felt a bit nervous about this meeting, as I had yet to meet any of them besides her mother. However, I immediately felt at ease. Marquis Ashley was a wonderfully considerate man. He could sense my anxiety, so he treated me as his daughter's friend rather than as the Saint. I was genuinely thankful for that.

But after them came one stranger after another, although I recognized some names. For example, people from House Drewes and House Aiblinger. I knew of House Drewes because that was the grand magus's family, and the latter was from the family of the knight commander of the Second Order.

It was rude of me, but I couldn't help but stare at them when I heard their familiar names. Both of them were relatives of people I knew. The representative from the knight commander's family bore a resemblance to him, but the representative from House Drewes looked nothing like the grand magus.

There was one other house whose representative I recognized.

"Thank you so much for inviting me today."

"And thank you so much for coming, Lord Hawke."

Josef Hawke stood before me. He had golden hair that softly reflected the sunlight and blue-gray eyes. He was the minister of military services and Knight Commander Albert Hawke's elder brother.

They shared the same hair color, though I found Josef's to be a shade darker. As it happened, this wasn't our first meeting. I had encountered him once before. Therefore we only exchanged simple greetings with one another this time around, perhaps because he knew I disliked being all formal.

It was my first time meeting his wife, however, so I gave her a polite hello. She had ash-colored hair with a slight purple hue and gray eyes. In short, she was a true beauty with an ethereal aura.

"I hear that today's event is modeled after ones from your place of birth?" she said.

"You heard correctly," I replied. "Today's party is all about celebrating cuisine."

"I hear that you created the recipes for everything that will be served today," she went on. "I am dearly looking forward to sampling the food I've heard so much about."

"I am as well," said Lord Hawke. "Thank you kindly for gracing us with this opportunity."

They were both intent on expressing their gratitude for this event. The point of the party had been written in the invitation, and as such, the guests all knew both that I had based the party on a food festival and that the food on offer would be re-creations of the food from my place of origin. I still didn't understand how that had gotten twisted into me being the one who had *originally* created these dishes.

"I didn't create the recipes," I clarified. "These are just imitations of what we ate at my old home. I hope you enjoy them."

"Is that so?" said Lord Hawke. "Well, it doesn't change the fact that it's all brand new to us. I'm sure my younger brothers are going to be quite disappointed when I tell them about today."

"I hear that neither of them will be attending."

“My apologies for that. Neither is the type to bring himself to this sort of social event.”

“It’s nothing to apologize for! I heard they have work too.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle dryly at the mention of Lord Hawke’s two brothers. As he said, both Lord Smarty-Glasses and Albert wouldn’t be turning up at this event. Lord Smarty-Glasses would be hard at work as usual at the Royal Magi Assembly, and Albert was out on an expedition with his knights in some domain that was quite far away.

Incidentally, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes wouldn’t be attending either. I heard he was off at another location for a different expedition.

I didn’t know how Lord Smarty-Glasses would feel, but I knew for sure that Albert and Yuri would be disappointed to hear they’d missed this event.

I suppose I could host some other event to give them the opportunity to try these dishes? I thought.

Just then, Lord Hawke leaned close to my ear as if he meant to whisper into it.

Huh? What’s he doing?! My heart lurched in surprise at his sudden approach.

“If you would be interested,” he said, “I could invite you to visit our home sometime. I shall invite my brothers as well.”

“Lord Hawke.”

Lord Hawke had lowered his voice, but Prince Rayne had heard. He *was* standing next to me. The prince addressed Lord Hawke with a critical tone as I stared at the lord in amazement. It was no surprise that the prince was concerned. Once one person took the initiative to offer the Saint a personal invitation, other people were sure to do the same.

Other people had actually done the same already, so Prince Rayne didn’t see this as *that* big of a problem. He only softly chided them, just as he had done with Lord Hawke. If anything, he was more tolerant of Lord Hawke’s advance than he was with others—the look he gave the lord was softer than the ones I’d seen from him before.

Maybe it was because Lord Hawke hadn’t delivered this invitation in a

haughty manner? But something else bothered me more than that.

Was he basically inviting me to his home—the Marquis of the Hawke Borderlands’ villa in the capital—to treat them to a meal? What he was getting at before was that his brothers would be disappointed that they’d missed out on eating all the dishes we were serving today, right?

Or did he mean something else entirely? As I mentally flailed, trying to understand what exactly he was inviting me to do, Lord Hawke smoothly stepped away and excused himself with a smile. *Wait—don’t just walk away after saying something that has a deeper meaning!*

However, even those thoughts were in vain because the eldest Hawke brother and his wife disappeared into the party as if nothing had happened.

After that, I was yet again drowning in hellos to the never-ending stream of guests. A little while later, the flow of people finally stopped, and an attendant whispered something into Prince Rayne’s ear to confirm that most of the guests were now inside.

“I suppose we too should join the party,” he said.

“Yes.” I nodded, and together, we walked in as well.

We entered the party venue and immediately ascended the platform that had been erected in the far back. As the host, it was my job to address everyone at the start of the event. I really wished I could skip that part, but no dice. My announcement allowed the party to commence. Too bad for me!

I felt everyone’s gazes trained on me as I assumed my spot at the highest point. I *really* hated speaking in front of a crowd. My expression stiffened and I felt like my heart was going to leap out of my mouth.

I want to get this over with as soon as possible and go hide somewhere super out of the way, I thought as I recalled the speech I had come up with ahead of time.

Somehow, I got through it, and then the guests were off to the races. They made straight for the tents as if they had been waiting impatiently this whole

time. All according to plan!

As I had explained to them on the invitations, the main purpose of this event was to celebrate cuisine. Since I had met each of them already at the entrance, I didn't want them to pay me any more mind; their goal was to thoroughly enjoy the food.

Despite that wish, I still saw some people try to approach me.

Uh-oh—please don't let them catch me!

I was completely tapped of mental energy after that speech. I didn't have it in me to endure being fawned over by people with whom I had briefly spoken all of one time.

I'll just pretend I didn't see them. Yeah.

And so, I urged Prince Rayne to take us to the area where the king and prime minister were seated. This tent was located near the platform in the part of the venue farthest to the back. Guards were posted at its entrance, so only those who had permission could enter.

It had been constructed to be a safe place, but it also served as a location for me to take shelter from bothersome nobles.

Unlike the tents where the food was being cooked, all three sides were enclosed by drapes, apart from the entrance, which was left open. Although we were outdoors, there was a rug inside the tent, along with a large folding table and chairs. In the corner was a smaller table with a water pitcher and the like.

I also discovered that it wasn't only the higher-ups inside. There was also a guard, a mage, an attendant, and a maid to wait on them.

The king and prime minister were already sitting down in the tent. I must have looked exhausted, because the second I entered, the king chuckled and said sympathetically, "You did well."

The prime minister, who was sitting beside the king, wore the same look. "The food should be here soon, I believe. Sit down and relax while we wait."

"Thank you very much," I replied as I wearily collapsed in the chair the attendant pulled out for me.

The maid set down some tea, which I tasted. Just as I was taking a brief moment to relax, another higher-up arrived. An attendant received Marquis Ashley, whom I had just met earlier.

The marquis was by himself, and I couldn't see anyone following behind him but for a different attendant, bearing a silver tray. I wondered what that was about, but as soon as I saw what was on the tray, I understood.

"I am glad to see you in good health, Your Majesty," said the marquis.

"No need for the formalities. What brings you here?"

"I have come to humbly offer this to you." The marquis picked up the bottle on the tray and held it out to the king.

"Is it wine?"

"No, a juice made from the roses for which my domain is known."

The juice was bottled as you would wine, so it was no surprise that the king would assume as much. However, I could tell that the king thought it a bit strange that the marquis had come to deliver the bottle personally. Upon hearing the marquis's response, he let out a sound of surprised admiration.

"I brought it here today thinking you might wish to enjoy it with your meal," said the marquis.

"Is that so? In that case, let us make a toast."

"Are you certain, Your Majesty? It is not alcoholic."

"That's all right. Sei, you made this too, didn't you?"

"Ah, yes. I did."

"Traditionally, we only make toasts with fermented brews, but a drink made by you is more than suitable for the job."

I nodded, and the marquis passed the juice to the attendant.

Perhaps I should have made a liqueur out of the roses instead of juice? But liqueur needed time to infuse and wouldn't have been ready for this particular event. I supposed it didn't matter, since the king didn't seem to mind the lack of alcohol.

Not long after, an attendant served us glasses full of the rose extract. The original color of the roses lent it a different hue than wine. The juice itself was transparent within the glass, and it looked very pretty.

When everyone complimented the color, even the marquis didn't seem as dissatisfied as he would have had others believe. The king led the toast, and we all took a sip. The scent and flavor of the juice brought everyone to voice their admiration.

"It's magnificent," the prime minister said.

"Indeed. I believe this drink would be very popular with women," the king said.

"You would be right," said the marquis. "I had my family taste it at home beforehand. My wife and daughter especially took to it."

"To think that a drink could taste like this. Now I'm very much looking forward to the meal."

The king looked at me, so I bowed my head and said, "Thank you."

I had come up with this event during my conversation with Marchioness Ashley during her tea party. The dishes were all food people had eaten back in the world I came from, which the noble ladies had all said they wished to try, and they had been made using ingredients from parts of the kingdom that were famous for producing specific products. Drinks were included in that spread, and the rose juice that the marquis had presented to us was one of them.

I had come up with the dishes on the menu and decided how to use these specialty products in discussion with Prince Rayne. I'd then shared my conclusions with the king, the prime minister, and other related officials.

I didn't know how much of a hand the king himself had played in it all. Regardless, he must have guessed that the juice was related to the party as soon as he heard that it was made with a local export. He must have then thought that I was the one who had provided the know-how to actually make it. The timing at which the marquis had presented the juice only further supported this conclusion.

As it so happened, the reason I had decided to discuss all of this with Prince

Rayne first was for the same reason I'd had him manage the guest list—that stuff about political balance and all. I'd had to be even more careful with the menu than I had been when picking guests.

If the Saint were to select a given region's specialty product for use in one of her works, everyone in this kingdom would automatically consider it a great honor. On top of that, if the resultant dish was in turn well received, then they could anticipate that it would lead to extremely high profits in the future.

With money and honor at stake, many people were eager to have their products in my hands. That was why we had to take political balance into account.

You guessed it—this whole thing had been a huge pain in the behind!

"Do you have plans to sell this on the market?" the prime minister asked me.

"Yes. Although I was thinking of leaving this to another company instead of mine."

"Oh? Is that so?"

"My company is busy enough as it is handling cosmetics."

"Ha ha ha. I understand. I suppose that can't be helped, since your beauty products are so popular."

Indeed, I was planning to leave the production and sales of the rose juice to the marquis's personal business ventures. The drink we were enjoying at that moment would be sold in individual bottles.

Naturally, I hadn't given them this right for free. I would be receiving a usage fee from the companies the lords of each domain had recommended to me, which would be calculated in proportion with production rates as well as by the terms of the agreement. It was more or less akin to a licensing agreement from my original world.

Similarly, I would offer whatever items couldn't be sold separately, like recipes, to anyone who wanted them using a similar contract. As such, only specific restaurants would be entitled to serve these dishes.

Prince Rayne was the one who had come up with this idea. At first, we had

discussed whether my company could handle everything. However, I'd thought it would be difficult for the company to manage food sales on top of cosmetics, at least at its current size. When I brought this up with Prince Rayne, he'd suggested this alternative.

"It's thanks to Lady Sei that my domain will profit from this innovation as well. I am most grateful to her."

"Please, the pleasure was all mine," I said. "I would like to thank you as well for all your cooperation for this event."

"That makes it sound like you'll be the one handling production, then, Lord Ashley?" the king asked.

"That is correct. Lady Sei herself proposed this arrangement."

"Oh, um, it was actually Prince Rayne's idea," I pointed out.

"Is that so? Does that mean that other domains will be benefiting from this sort of agreement as well?" the marquis asked.

"Indeed. I plan to sign a contract with anyone who desires one and leave the manufacturing and sales of each new product to the lords."

As we continued our discussion, the food was brought in. There were large portions of each dish placed on platters on the table, because even the appearance of the food was a delight. I was to tell the maid what I wanted to eat, and she would serve a portion of those dishes for me.

All the food brought in was new, never before served at the institute's dining hall. The king gazed at the dishes with anticipation.

There had been a great deal of discussion before we ate, during which we had identified which dishes were using which ingredients from which domains. Thus, just as the platters of food were being set on the table, the king said, "Shall we begin?"

I could tell he was truly looking forward to this meal. Moreover, the food appeared to meet everyone's expectations. As they dug in, they excitedly hailed the flavors and fragrances. There were all sorts of dishes that they had never eaten before, but they seemed to like them all, by and large, so that was a bit of

a relief.

“I’m thinking I should take a look at the venue,” I said.

“Very well. I suspect it won’t be easy, but take care,” the king told me.

I nodded and smiled stiffly. “Th-thank you.”

I had a feeling I knew what he was referring to: I was about to be surrounded by all kinds of people.

I mentally wailed as I stood up, though Prince Rayne stood with me. He was coming to lead the way. I could practically see a halo around the sparkling, smiling prince. It was extremely reassuring to have him by my side—he was just so good at handling people.

With this dependable ally by my side, my steps felt slightly lighter as we headed outside to the battleground.

I squinted at the blinding sun as soon as I stepped outside the tent. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I was finally able to make out how things were going.

My guests were enjoying the meals they had selected at the central tables. Their expressions told me that the fare had been generally well received, which meant that the event was a success, for the time being.

I felt someone’s eyes on me and casually glanced to see who it was, only to find that the people who had tried to talk to me before I went inside the VIP area were watching me.

Had they been waiting for me all this time? I felt a bit bad, but I also wished they would just enjoy the food. *Hmm, maybe I should talk to them a bit?*

As I worried, Prince Rayne urged me to move. “Lady Sei, where shall we go first?”

“Oh, hmm, I’m not sure.”

“Lady Ashley is in attendance today, so perhaps we should speak with her first?”

“All right.”

The prince's immediate suggestion to go see Liz reminded me that the two of them were the same age. They had to be well acquainted, as they were both children of high-ranking nobility.

Liz was a good friend of mine, so I instantly agreed to this idea.

Prince Rayne began purposefully walking in a direction as if he already knew where Liz was. Based on the trajectory, I was sure he was headed in the direction of the tent distributing rose juice. Perhaps Liz was there to help promote it; the juice *had* been made using the roses from her family's domain.

However, he didn't walk to the tent in a straight line. We kept checking out the other displays along the way. Every tent was doing well, and there appeared to be no problems at present.

A lord at each tent was explaining how ingredients from their region had been used to guests who came to take food. Everyone seemed to have had the same idea.

Prince Rayne also took the opportunity to say hello to each lord. I did as well, of course. We could also exchange words with whomever a given lord was talking to at the time, so it made for efficient socializing.

It had the additional effect of enabling me to gradually meet all of the people who had been vigilantly waiting to talk to me. These people were able to intermittently say their piece while I spoke with others in front of the various tents.

Fortunately, nothing that happened was nearly as bad as I had imagined. Everyone had only wanted to speak to me to give me their thoughts about the party and politely promote their own domain's exports.

I had braced myself for the possibility of mothers trying to talk up their sons like Liz had warned me about, but luckily no one mentioned any potential matches. Perhaps it was because Prince Rayne was at my side?

We ended up speaking of not only each domain's exports but also the finer points of residing in each region. Perhaps this was more of a preliminary skirmish on that front. Some people invited me to visit their domains in the future, but Prince Rayne gently drove those people away for me.

To no surprise, the reason I used to decline their invitations was monster slaying. Although things were stable for the moment, the king had yet to declare that the problem had been completely eradicated. As such, I could claim that we were still in the middle of dealing with it.

As we made our way around and stopped at each tent, we soon spotted a crowd up ahead. Actually, we had spotted it a while back—there were so many people that it was impossible to miss. I had mostly been ignoring it and focusing on socializing with the people in front of me.

The crowd was composed of people wearing brightly colored dresses. In other words, it was a crowd of women. I had a hunch about this, and it was proven right: They were all gathered at the tent serving rose juice. Now I was afraid to approach it for a completely different reason. However, I spotted a familiar face within the crowd, so I gathered my resolve and walked over.

“Liz.”

“If it isn’t Sei! And Prince Rayne as well. You’ve come all this way to see me?” Liz replied with a large, joyous smile.

At the signal of Liz’s voice, all the women present curtsied in unison.

Huh? Wait, we already finished with greetings already! Oh, but I guess it’s because Prince Rayne’s here too, so they have to?

Prince Rayne told them to raise their heads, and the ladies relaxed.

With that, I continued speaking with Liz. “Of course I wanted to come see you. Although I also wanted to see how the other tents were doing as well.”

“Of course.”

“All things considered, it looks like your tent is rather popular with the ladies.”

“Very much so. Everyone loves the aroma of the rose juice.”

As Liz said this, the women began to express their own opinions. The king had been right; the women of this world simply adored the fragrance of roses.

“Does the juice have any kind of effect?” a woman asked me.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I heard that food can alter one’s very state of being.”

“Ooh, yes, I remember hearing that. But I think that was limited to only food made by people who have Cooking skills?” another woman said.

“Is that true?”

It seemed that a number of them had been hoping the juice would have some kind of additional benefit. The second woman was right that in order to make food that imbued people with special powers, the person who made it needed to have Cooking skills. Unfortunately, all of the rose juice had been made by people who weren’t thus gifted, so the juice wouldn’t do the sort of things they were hoping for.

When Liz explained this to the women, they all looked a bit disappointed.

Back in the world I’d come from, food had provided all kinds of benefits even though we hadn’t had skills. As such, it was possible that the juice had some kind of effect I wasn’t aware of, more specifically, the sort of effect it had been said to have back in my original world.

Incidentally, using these ingredients to make a potion using the Pharmaceuticals skill created something much more potent than a juice made using the Cooking skill. But I had a feeling that mentioning this fact would lead to something troublesome, so I decided to hold off on that comment.

You see, there was another part of roses that was famous for its beauty-related effects. This part was their seeds: rose hips. It was said they could lighten skin color and make your skin more beautiful.

If I had been dumb enough to blurt out that fact there, I would definitely have caused an uproar. The zeal this world’s noble ladies had for beautifying themselves was not to be underestimated.

“Well, I should be on my way, then.”

“Wait, I shall accompany you.”

“You can step away from here?”

“Yes. I think father should be back soon enough.”

After speaking with the women for a bit, the topic soon changed from food to

topics I was less versed in, so I tried to bid Liz farewell. Yet she insisted on coming with us. Since she assured me that things would be fine, I agreed to have her accompany me as we looked around the other tents.

The next place we headed was the area that a large portion of the guests had been especially excited about. We gradually made our way there, and I continued saying hello to everyone at each tent just as I had done on my way to the Ashleys' display. All of the tents had crowds, but this area in particular had an even bigger one.

In short, it was the area where they were serving food made using ingredients from Zaidera. They were offering the sort of food that in my original world would have been described as Japanese or Chinese food.

The area we had passed through mainly served Western dishes, which was the sort of food available in the Kingdom of Salutania. But this area's ingredients being what they were, there were all sorts of unfamiliar smells and flavors for people to experience. I had been worried that the guests wouldn't like these new foods, but those worries proved unfounded.

Some people's expressions were unsure as they tried the food, perhaps because of the unique smells, but those looks soon changed to ones of awe. There were even people whose eyes sparkled at the unusual tastes. Naturally, some didn't care for the new dishes, but they were fewer in number than I had imagined.

We circled the area while listening to the opinions of people who were excited about the fascinating new spread when I spotted another familiar face: Marchioness Barchet, whom I had met at Marchioness Ashley's tea party.

"Hello, Lady Barchet."

"Oh, Lady Sei! Thank you for stopping by." Marchioness Barchet smiled even more broadly at me, like a flower coming into full bloom.

The ladies she was speaking with had also been at the tea party, and they all said hello upon recognizing me. I had come at a good time, as they had just finished eating.

"Have you finished enjoying the food?" I asked.

“Yes! It was all wonderfully delicious.”

“That’s right! I was just telling Lady Barchet my thoughts.”

“I had assumed this was a dish from Zaidera since it has rice, but I heard it’s actually from your hometown.”

“That’s right. Though, to be more precise, it was a dish we ate that actually came from another country.”

“Oh! How interesting.”

A chef brought out a large pot with two handles from inside the tent and placed it on the table, which made everyone nearby let out a sound of joy. Perhaps the food hooked them immediately because of its vibrant hues.

The tent it came from was serving colorful paella. Its characteristic yellow color came from the saffron with which the rice and ingredients were cooked—the same saffron that was the local specialty of Marquis Barchet’s domain.

When I had learned about the saffron during the tea party, I had immediately thought of paella. So because of that, I had instantly decided to use it for this party.

“It looks so delicious!”

“It does! Have you gotten to try it yet, Liz?”

“Not yet.”

“Let’s have some together, then.”

As it turned out, Prince Rayne and I had yet to have any paella either. We had tried some of the foods that had been delivered to the VIP tent, but we had left before the paella arrived. If I had to guess, it was being served at the VIP tent right at that very moment.

At Prince Rayne’s order, the chef swiftly served portions of the paella to us. That being said, we knew there were other people waiting, so we asked that they be served first. However, everyone felt obliged to us, so we wound up getting our share before them.

Ah, yeah, I guess it makes sense. This was a country beholden to a class

system, and our group was composed of the Saint, the second prince, and the daughter of a marquis. I felt bad about it, but I thanked everyone and gratefully partook of the paella.

It tasted incredible, and Liz and Prince Rayne both enjoyed it.

At the end of the party, the three of us chatted as we savored the food at one of the center tables. As we did, people took turns coming over to join us, so I thought we met our other goal of socializing pretty well.

The problem was that while I had originally been hoping that hosting this party would lead to receiving fewer invitations, the event only served to increase interest in hosting me.

That wasn't all either. Everyone had liked the food at the Saint's party so much that they wound up talking about it for a long time. I was optimistic that one party would satisfy the guests, but I learned later that the palace had received a flood of petitions for me to hold another.

Act 4:

After the Festival

TWO WEEKS AFTER the successful party, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes showed up at the institute's dining hall. He was after a meal served with rice.

I had invited all manner of people to my event, but unfortunately, the grand magus had been unable to attend. He had been too busy taking care of a monster in a domain that was far from the capital.

Naturally, he knew I had held this party. That said, he hadn't thought that I would be serving dishes with rice at the event, which made sense, as rice was a precious ingredient. Even after Yuri had claimed he wanted it for his research, I hadn't given that much of my stock to him. I would have doubted I could serve it as part of a lavish feast too.

In addition to all this, I had served new rice-based recipes at the party. As obsessed with the grain as Yuri was, it came as no surprise that he had thrown a tantrum when he heard. No surprise at all. However, what I *hadn't* expected was him kicking up a huge fuss at the Royal Magi Assembly and *then* charging straight to the institute to demand a chance to try the food in question. I had assumed that he would be much calmer about it and that we would discuss the new recipes during my magic classes.

Oh, I learned about that huge fuss from the mages who followed him. I could only assume that Lord Smarty-Glasses had told them not to let Yuri out of their sights. I apologized as they relayed the events of the day.

Ultimately, I wound up promising the grand magus that he could eat a rice dish at the institute's dining hall. I had a feeling that, otherwise, he would never leave.

And so, I planned an unveiling of my newest dishes at the dining hall. After all, Yuri wasn't the only one who had missed the party. Starting with Johan, everyone at our research institute had been unable to attend. Thus I decided that if we were going to make these foods again, everyone should be able to

partake.

Usually, when we came to the cafeteria, we picked out a particular meal we wanted, but that day we had a buffet just like the party. Not only were we serving the same food as I had at the event, but there were also some additional recipes as well. Notably, most of them used rice.

When he charged into the institute, Yuri had asked what other kinds of rice-based meals there were. That was why I had decided to make other recipes for which we had the relevant ingredients. In exchange, I had Yuri help out with the arrangements. The biggest thing he gave me was a familiar square-shaped container that retained heat—the sort you commonly see at buffets.

A multitude of chefs handled everything for the party, but we didn't have them work at the institute. This was why I needed to put the food in containers that would retain the heat—you know, so the food wouldn't get cold.

At first, I had asked Yuri for a stone enchanted with magic for the same purpose, but the grand magus was magnanimous indeed. He gave me not a stone but the actual thing I'd really hoped for. I felt a bit guilty that he had gone so out of his way, but I gratefully accepted the container all the same. It was likely his way of repaying me for inviting him whenever I hosted similar meals.

On the day of the unveiling, just before noon, more people than usual were gathered in the institute's dining hall. Since we were serving the same sort of unusual food as had been served at the party, all of the people who would have ordinarily come in at different times were present for the start of lunch.

I was explaining the new food to Johan, Jude, and some others when Yuri arrived. I was certain he would bring a whole squad of mages with him, but contrary to my expectations, he was alone. "Thank you for having me today. I've been looking forward to this a great deal."

"And thank you for helping me with the arrangements. Are you here by yourself today?"

"Yes. Will that be a problem?"

"No, I just thought that you might be bringing some of your colleagues."

"There were some who showed interest in coming, but I heard this would be

a private unveiling, so I came alone. Besides, it is not like we have a limitless supply of rice.”

“I see. Well, please take whichever dishes catch your fancy and enjoy.”

For myself, I was pretty much certain I knew the real reason Yuri had come without anyone else: he’d left them behind so he could eat as much rice as possible.

Yuri had such a happy smile on his face that he was practically humming as we spoke. As soon as I gave the go-ahead, he made a beeline for the dishes made with rice.



I wasn't the only one wearing a crooked smile as we watched him; the other researchers who also knew of Yuri's rice fixation were wearing the same look.

The grand magus chose a place to sit closest to the rice dishes and brought every single one of them back to his seat. Starting with paella, he took at least one of everything: rice balls, mixed sushi, omurice, fried rice, and so on. It was as if he were saying he had no interest in any other kind of food—at least not if it didn't have that special ingredient.

I thought he would immediately dig in, but the first thing he did was Appraise the food. This was a kind of magic that only a few people could cast, and here he was deploying it liberally to investigate the effects of one new dish after another. Then he'd mm-hmm to himself with a nod and write down the results on a notepad he had produced seemingly out of nowhere. Whenever he identified a dish with an unusual effect, he let out a little cheer.

Yup. He never changed.

Although I was mostly referring to Yuri, our researchers were of a pretty similar mindset. Several of them engaged him, curious to learn his findings. Yuri shared his notepad, and a few brave souls even asked him to Appraise the other new dishes too, making it a “well, while you're at it” kind of thing.

And so, only once he was done Appraising everything did Yuri finally commence with the eating.

“Phew. Oh, Lady Sei.” Yuri beamed at me as I brought him some tea after he was done. “This is *quite* delicious. Thank you.”

“You're welcome. Did you make any new discoveries?” I was also curious about his results.

“Did I ever! Did you make this omurice with different ingredients than you did before?”

“Hmm... I might have used different ingredients for the chicken and rice stir-fry that the omelet contains.”

“That must be it! As it happens, this dish has a higher MP recovery rate than it did the last time I checked, and—” Yuri energetically told me all about his

findings, one of which being that depending on the ingredients used, effects might not change but *increase*.

It made sense, since the same thing happened with potions. However, it sounded like a brand-new discovery to him, based on the overly excited and passionate way he spoke of his plans for future experiments.

After we wrapped up our food talk, we moved on to recent events. I mentioned seeing someone from House Drewes at the party, and Yuri replied with a disinterested “oh.” That brought the topic to a screeching halt.

Meanwhile, Yuri had been diligently at work slaying monsters. Expeditions were an important part of the responsibilities of the Royal Magi Assembly, but Yuri was so diligent about taking part in them because he was trying to raise his base level. Unfortunately for him, his base level was already so high that he no longer gained much from dealing with the monsters around the capital. That was why he went around seeking out fights with strong monsters in regions far away from the palace. It had paid off too, because he had reached Level 49—four levels higher than he had been when we first met.

“Just one more until Level 50. Then I just need five more to close the gap between us,” he said cheerfully.

Just what did he mean by that? “The gap?”

When I asked him to explain, he clarified that he meant for his Appraisal Magic to work. This fact was supposedly the reason why, at present, I reflected this magic back at him.

Appraisal Magic didn’t work on someone who had a higher base level than that of the caster. Consequently, I had repelled his spell before. Also consequently, he was grinding for levels, all in the hopes that his Appraisal would work the next time he cast it on me.

“The next time? But I thought we agreed you didn’t need to Appraise me.”

“Well...”

“Well?”

“I want to. Because I want to know all there is to know about you.”

“Please don’t.”

I had a feeling that Yuri probably just wanted to see my stats. He was interested in my Saintly powers in the same way he had been interested in the food. Even so, I suspected there was another possible meaning underlying his words. I couldn’t help but dig further, even though I pretty much already knew, based on the way he was phrasing it.

“Ah, I hate to tell you this, but I’ve leveled up as well.”

“What?! You have?”

The grand magus looked flabbergasted, a rare sight on his face. Just as he thought he had caught up to me, he had learned he was still lagging behind.

I felt awful dashing his hopes like that, but it was true that my base level had increased. If it was difficult for Yuri to raise his levels, the same ran doubly so for me, but I believed that I had been able to level up so much because of all the purging I’d done of the miasma and so forth.

As you might expect from something that created monsters, the black swamps I purified granted me a ton of experience points. I hadn’t paid much attention to this though, so it was more of a hunch. I was sure I was pretty accurate when I guessed that while Yuri had gained four levels from all of the expeditions he had gone on, I had gained two.

Although there was possibly another factor as well. Namely, I was from another world. When you considered my current level and the degree of difficulty it took to raise your level, I leveled up so fast that the standard calculations didn’t really apply.

“How can this be?”

“Uh, well, we haven’t heard of there being any black swamps recently, so I’m sure you’ll catch up before long.”

Those words seemed kind of empty when I considered how hard he had already worked to gain a mere four levels.

Even if the black swamps yielded tons of experience points, at present, I was the only one who could do anything about them. It was possible that Yuri might

be able to help if he tried hard enough, or if he somehow managed to come up with a purification spell that was similar to mine. But in that case, I suspected his strategy would differ.

Yuri wore an expression not too unlike one of despair, and I sympathized with him. I consoled him as I unpacked my hypothesis, and when I told him I couldn't help these level increases, he seemed to perk back up a bit.

But after all this, if he actually did catch up to my level, then I couldn't exactly refuse if he asked to Appraise me again. Indeed, he asked me if he could, a pout on his face. I could only smile weakly and agree.

With the party over and done with, I was back to leisurely working away at the institute, until one day I received yet another summons for an audience with the king and prime minister.

I thought everything went well with the party, but perhaps there was a problem? I wondered, curious.

When I asked the messenger why I was being summoned, he said it was for an expedition. It had been a while since I had last been on one of those.

I haven't heard about any new black swamps being discovered recently, but maybe they found one, I thought a bit anxiously as Johan and I entered the king's office.

Inside the office, both the king and prime minister were waiting for us. I sat on one of the sofas at the king's prompting. First, he thanked me for hosting the event the other day. I was relieved to hear that everyone had enjoyed themselves so much. After he briefly went over some of the reviews the guests had shared, we delved into the reason I had been summoned.

For this expedition, we would be heading to a domain adjacent to the capital. It wasn't a domain known for being the largest supply center of alchemical supplies, like Klausner's Domain, or the country's breadbasket or anything. Rather there was a relatively big highway that ran through it from the capital, and thus it was a strategic location along the road.

They wanted to send the Knights of the First Order into a forest near that very

highway.

“The First Order?”

“Yes. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Not at all. It will just be my first journey with them.”

During past expeditions, I had always been with the Second and Third Orders. Knowing that this time, I'd be with the First, I couldn't help asking aloud just to be sure. I felt a bit uneasy. I didn't know anyone in that Order.

But I'll probably have some people with me from the Royal Magi Assembly, right? I hope they'll be people I know, I thought.

I was completely missing the unhappy look on Johan's face.

The prime minister then explained why the First Order had been chosen. I had purified some black swamps already, so there were fewer monsters roaming about than before. But since there were monsters popping up in some places, they had already deployed the Third Order to deal with them, as they had the most experience fighting monsters. The Second Order was also otherwise occupied at the moment. That left only the First Order.

The First Order was normally in charge of maintaining public order in the capital. They rarely went out on expeditions, but they were ideal for this mission, as we would be heading somewhere close to the capital and didn't expect to encounter any powerful monsters. From what they had heard, the situation wasn't yet critical in this domain. Rather, just as when they had been deployed to take care of monsters in this area before, this was more of a political expedition.

“And, well, that's what we'll be saying officially.”

“Huh?”

Just as I was agreeing with this brief summary, the prime minister flipped the table. Not literally, of course.

“I feel awful for troubling you after that wonderful party you hosted the other day...”

The prime minister began to tell us the true problem, leaving me stunned.

Basically, this expedition was a front; it would be more like a matchmaking event. And this was all happening because of that same party.

According to the prime minister, the party guests had indeed been selected while keeping all of the political factions in balance. Regardless, that didn't mean that there hadn't been a modicum of bias.

Setting aside the question of the posts that people held, when you took a broad view of their day-to-day responsibilities, the majority of them qualified as officials and bureaucrats. For example, while some had belonged to an order of knights, they had been the ones who handled the accounting and administrative aspect of things rather than those who went out on expeditions.

Naturally, there had been reasons for this occupation-based bias.

The first was that I mostly associated with people from the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora as well as the knights and mages who accompanied me during expeditions. In other words, they had been trying to correct for the fact that I had inevitably wound up only really knowing people involved with the military. Thus the event had been meant to give people with whom I didn't normally associate the chance to meet the Saint.

The second reason was that a lot of the knights and mages had been unable to attend anyway because they had been out on expeditions in distant regions. Both the knight commander of the Third Order and the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly had been absent for that same reason. Only their family members had gone in their stead.

However, no one had complained because most of the knights from the Second and Third Orders, as well as the mages, had been deployed. Some people had expressed their wish that they could have gotten a chance to taste the food, though.

Nevertheless, this didn't apply to the Knights of the First Order. None of them had been invited to the party. So, they had requested the chance to go on an expedition with the Saint. Which brought us to our current situation.

"Oh? I thought you wanted me to go on this expedition for political reasons?" I asked, trying to better understand what he was getting at.

“That’s right,” the king replied with an apologetic look on his face. “And I beg your pardon for that.”

If the king had made this decision, then it would be best to just obey. I didn’t exactly consider him an ally in whom I had placed my complete trust, but he had been fairly considerate to me until now. So I did trust him, to an extent. I was sure that he had proposed this thinking it would be in my best interests.

When I said I would agree to go on the expedition, both the king and prime minister thanked me, looking relieved.

Then the day came for the expedition with the First Order. Just as the prime minister had said, the monsters were weak and our journey went smoothly. This was at least partly because there were hardly any monsters at all. I didn’t even have to wonder why that was.

All in all, it felt more like a picnic than an expedition, especially with all of the breaks we took. We ate and had drinks during these breaks, just as I did with the Second and Third Orders. We also chatted as we ate and got to know one another.

The only difference was in how these knights behaved. Many took turns coming to wait on me, and it was always multiple people at once.

When it was time for a break, two knights would escort me, one on either side, to a folding stool that had been placed down for my use. We would chat as we walked there, and honestly it felt like having two absolute dreamboats on either arm.

Then, after the attendants with us prepared food and drink, they would bring it over to us—but a knight nearby would take the refreshments before handing them over to me with a smile on his face. This was a third knight, other than the ones who had escorted me to my seat.

Our seats were arranged in a circle, and the knights who escorted me would usually sit at my sides. There would be four others besides those two, including the one who served me. Then I’d pass the time eating and drinking while chatting with the given bevy of knights. Also, the knights in my circle rotated

out every single break, so we always had to begin with introductions.

I did recognize a familiar face among the mages who were with us, but he never sat with me. During our very first rest, I made eye contact with him from afar and he gave me a look of sincere pity. It kind of made me feel like a calf on its way to be sold at market.

Come to think of it, I had felt similarly the first time I had to go on an expedition with the Second Order. Granted, I think the feeling had been way worse with them. Those guys regarded me, the Saint, as sacred, and had been assiduously waiting on me hand and foot. It had been incredibly awkward, and from the second time on, I'd had to persuade them to either let me do everything myself—like I did with the Third Order—or have an attendant do it all instead. If I remembered correctly, my request had paid off and it hadn't been nearly so bad the third time around.

"Phew..." At the end of our third break, I had a brief moment alone and couldn't help but sigh.

I had thought no one would hear, but unfortunately someone did. "Are you tired?" a voice asked me from behind with a wry chuckle.

I turned around to discover it was the First Order's commander.

Every single member of this order was top of the line—even their demeanors were elegant. Perhaps because of that, this already married commander had been placed with me as a supervisor of sorts, to ensure no one tried to aggressively make any moves on me.

"Just a little," I confessed. "But we've already passed the turnaround point, so I'll hold on for a bit longer."

"You're being pushed past your limits, aren't you? I apologize for my men," the commander said in a hushed tone.

He knew exactly what was exhausting me. We smiled awkwardly at one another.

"I feel bad too, though," I said. "I'm just not used to being treated like this."

"I heard as much from the knight commander. We warned them not to make

any grand gestures, but you can see how well they listened.”

We started walking as we spoke quietly to one another. Because I had admitted to being tired of having to deal with the knights, the commander stayed with me for basically the whole journey back.

For some reason, the other knights didn’t approach as we spoke. Was it because they had been told not to in advance?

Regardless, thanks to this, I felt a little less stressed out than before.

There wasn’t much longer left in our journey. We made a circle through the forest, after which we would take the same road home. I knew there wouldn’t be much left once we reached it, so I had the chance to do things besides be on the lookout for monsters.

From time to time, I would survey the forest for herbs while we walked. That was when I spotted a cave that I hadn’t noticed on our way in. It had a gaping wide entrance, and I wasn’t able to see all the way into the back. From where I stood, it was simply too dark.

As I gazed into the darkness, I suddenly remembered the video games I had played back in Japan. In those, there were always way more monsters in caves than in the forests and plains.

That was when I also remembered that miasma liked to collect in dark places, such as in the depths of forests. So what if...

“Is something the matter?” the commander called to me, concern clear in his voice. I had frozen in the midst of reaching for an herb.

“Oh, sorry.”

I had let my thoughts stray as I crouched to pick the herb and gotten lost gazing into the cave. It was a bad habit of mine, freezing in place when I got focused on thinking. I apologized to the commander and quickly stowed the herb away.

“I noticed there’s a cave over there.” I stood and pointed at it.

The commander looked in the direction I was pointing. “Oh, yes, you’re right. There is. I heard about it during our preliminary investigation.”

“I heard that miasma likes to collect in places like that. Are we going to investigate it?”

“No, that cave is shallow. It isn’t much different from the rest of the forest.”

The cave had been deemed not a threat, so we were giving it a miss, at least for now. The commander encouraged me to keep going, so I started walking away from it.

But for some reason, a reluctant feeling tugged at me.

The commander said the cave was safe, but what about caves in other places? Worry pricked at my heart, ever so slightly.

It wasn’t until after my return to the capital that I learned my fears were right on the money.

After the expedition, which had been more mentally than physically draining, I had three days off.

Despite it being free time, I didn’t spend those days doing anything different from usual. The only thing I definitely didn’t do was make potions, since Johan forbade me from working on them when I was supposed to be on break.

And so, I was doing my daily watering of my herb gardens and seeing how my plants were doing when Knight Commander Albert Hawke arrived.

“Sei.”

“Hello, Lord Hawke.”

It felt like it had been ages since we last saw each other. I mentioned this to him, and he told me that he had just returned from his expedition the day before. Considering he had left before the party I hosted, he must have gone pretty far away. Because of that, he too had three days off.

For some reason, we were in the same boat.

“So you just got back?” I asked. “Good job out there.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I’m sure you’ve had a lot going on too, with the party and all. Congratulations on getting through it.”

“Yeah, it was a lot. Thanks.”

“Was Prince Rayne your escort for the event?”

“He was. He’s in charge of things related to the Saint, so he helped me a bunch with the prep work for the party too.”

“Is that so? He’s good at what he does, so I’m guessing everything went off without a hitch.”

“Yes! He was a huge help.”

“I only wish I could have been there to assist you as well.”

“Don’t worry about it. You had a job to do, after all.”

“I know. I just wish I could have been your escort.”

O-oh my God! I really wish he would stop dropping surprise bombs on me like that.

Albert smiled with faint regret, which filled me with a tremendous sense of guilt even though I knew I had done nothing wrong. I tried to say something to make him feel better, but that just made him burst out laughing—as if he hadn’t been able to hold back any longer.

Wait, was that a joke just now? Was he teasing me?! Arrrgh!

“I do wish you wouldn’t tease me,” I pouted.

“I’m sorry. But I really do wish that I could have been your escort.” Albert said this with such a disappointed face that it felt like a direct blow to the sternum.

Oh. Okay. He really wishes that... For some reason, I was overcome with shyness and could no longer look him in the eye. “Oh... Well, hopefully next time then,” I said, still averting my gaze.

“Yes. I’ll be glad to be your escort upon the next opportunity.” I had a feeling he was grinning broadly as he spoke. “By the way, I heard that you served a whole spread of new foods at your party.”

“That’s correct. More than half the dishes were ones I hadn’t made before.”

“I would have come if not for the expedition. I wish I could have tasted them.”

“Our dining hall has started serving some of the new dishes, though not all of them.”

“Really?”

“Yup. Oh! And I’m pretty sure we’re serving some of them today! Would you like to join me for lunch?”

Albert agreed to my invitation without a second’s hesitation.

It wasn’t yet midday, but it seemed late enough for lunch. The two of us immediately headed to the dining hall.

“What a pretty color. What is this?” he asked.

“This is a rice dish called paella.”

“So this is paella... I heard there was a rice dish with a striking color.”

“That would be this one, yup.”

Lunch today was paella accompanied by chicken stewed in tomato sauce, with salad and vegetable soup. With the yellow of the paella, the red of the tomato sauce, and the green of the salad, it made for a truly vibrant meal.

Transportation could be an issue with this food, so the paella had been made with pork instead of seafood. This particular meal was especially meat forward, what with the pork and chicken. But I think Albert welcomed it, because his eyes were sparkling as he gazed at the food.

While I was glad that everyone had liked the food at the party, getting Albert’s approval was an entirely different matter. I was worried that he might not like it. He didn’t regularly eat rice, and it moreover used saffron for seasoning, which he also wasn’t used to.

However, it seemed I didn’t need to worry so much. I supposed it helped that it was a Western dish. In any case, Albert told me it was delicious and even had seconds.

“By the way, I heard that you just got back from an expedition yesterday as well?” he said.

“That I did. Although we didn’t travel too far in the first place.”

“How did it go?”

“Hmm, well, there weren’t many monsters, so it didn’t really feel like an expedition, per se.”

“Really?”

“Yeah... It was more like that time we went to the southern forest.”

After we were done and cleared our plates, we didn’t really have anything on our to-do lists, so we stayed put and had some afternoon tea. Albert went on asking me about the expedition I had gone on. When I alluded to our time in the southern forest, he seemed to grasp what had happened.

He put a hand to his lips, but from the look in his eye, it was obvious that he was trying not to laugh. He was probably remembering that little field trip too.

I mean, we all knew that weak monsters didn’t turn up when I was around. There was a long-standing theory that the very presence of the Saint weakened the miasma in a given area and prevented monsters from spawning.

I pouted without saying a word, but judging from how he burst out laughing, no longer able to contain himself, he knew what I was sulking about.

After recovering himself, Albert took on a slightly more serious expression as he changed the subject. “I heard that you were with the First Order for this trip.”

He must have known I was—it wasn’t like he could avoid knowing, as the knight commander of the Third Order.

“Yeah. It was my first time going out with them...”

“Did something happen?”

To be honest, it had been extremely taxing, if mainly in a mental sense. But I was a bit unsure of whether I should share that with him. Be that as it may, my hesitation caused Albert’s expression to cloud over with worry.

“Oh, nothing. Nothing really happened, it’s just that there were so many shiny people there.” I panicked, trying to find a way to smooth things over, but my words only led to Albert’s expression growing confused. I supposed that had been pretty abstract.

“‘Shiny’ people?”

“Like how the Second Order treats me? Or maybe it was more like they were treating me like a princess?” Though I tried, I only got less coherent as I described my exchanges with the First Order. It was just difficult, trying to figure out how exactly to explain.

But when I thought about it, given the way Salutanian gentlemen were expected to behave, there wasn’t really a problem with them treating me like royalty. I generally kept away from high society, so I probably just didn’t know any better. Perhaps this was normal for nobles.

When I was done, I asked Albert to confirm as much, but his vague answer left me at a loss. He didn’t confirm or deny this hypothesis. Perhaps he was trying to say that it depended on the person?

In a bid to change the mood, I asked him about the expedition he’d gone on. My plan worked! His regular expression returned as he began regaling me with the tale.

Because I had purged black swamps all over the kingdom, there were fewer monsters turning up nationwide. However, one region had seen an increase in monsters, and Albert had gone to investigate the cause.

The region was quite remote from the capital, and the farther you got from the capital, the stronger the monsters that appeared. This was why Albert had gone along with the knights, as these monsters had been so much more powerful.

“So did you figure out where they were all coming from?” I asked.

“We haven’t, not yet. We searched the more likely areas, though.”

“Do you usually find them in a certain sort of place? Like ones that share a common feature?”

“We’ve considered that as well, but we couldn’t find a connection.”

An increase in monsters was serious enough to shake a country, so I was sure that they had multiple people on this investigation, all working to figure out the cause. I was equally sure that they had to be very good at their jobs, seeing as

they worked for the palace.

Could the reason they haven't found the cause be because multiple factors are complicating the rise in appearances? Or maybe... As I thought, I suddenly remembered what I had seen the other day. "What kind of places qualify as 'more likely areas'?"

"First, the forests. Next, the prairies. After that, any large bodies of water, such as a lake."

"Did you search inside the caves and caverns as well?"

"We did search some during our investigation, but there are a number that we haven't checked yet."

According to Albert, they didn't have enough people to explore every single possible area of interest all at once. Therefore they focused on efficiency and investigated the most probable and easily reached locations first.

I had brought it up only because of what I remembered, but setting aside the question of caverns, it seemed likely that there were a number of small caves that they simply had yet to discover. I could understand how it would be impossible to search for caves that they didn't even know how to find, let alone to explore them with a limited number of available searchers.

"I just think there could be a black swamp inside one of them," I said.

"It's certainly possible..."

Then the following day, I was yet again summoned to the palace. Speak of the devil—you know the drill.

In a certain domain, a black swamp had been discovered within a cave.

Act 5:

Hawke's Domain

AFTER THE FIRST BLACK SWAMP was found, reports came in from all around the nation, one after another. Black swamps had been discovered in caves and caverns in every single domain.

I wouldn't go so far as to say it held exactly true to the adage, "where there's one, there's one hundred," but it was true that the reports came in rapid succession. Maybe it was simply the result of finally being able to check places they hadn't previously prioritized.

The black swamps came in a variety of sizes, but I went to each area to purify every single one of them regardless of their size. I was a bit tired from traveling all around the country, but fortunately, I was able to handle them.

At long last, the reports stopped coming in, and just as I finally had a moment to rest, a request for a knightly order to be deployed arrived at the palace. After hearing the details, the king immediately decided to also deploy the Saint.

The request had come from Albert's family, House Hawke. Their domain was far to the north, and just as their rank, Marquis of the Hawke Borderlands, suggested, it was located along the national border. It was an important location for the country, since a highway leading to another country ran through it.

House Hawke's lands employed a large number of soldiers, which made sense, as they had to be vigilant against raids from the country on their border. Where the kingdom's army protected the borders, House Hawke's private forces protected the lands of the domain, and mercenaries bolstered whoever hired them. These soldiers not only fought people, they also protected the region they were stationed in from monsters, which appeared frequently.

Due to the large number of soldiers they kept handy, they had been able to handle the monster population on their own without aid from the knightly Orders. Under normal circumstances, they never needed to rely on the palace.

The king likely viewed this request for aid—from such a strong house that governed such an important area—as alarming.

The palace acted quickly, and a week after the request from House Hawke arrived, I left the capital with one of the Orders.

As we were in a hurry, we didn't stay long at the manors in each region along the way, just as we had when traveling to Klausner's Domain. Nevertheless, since the Hawke Borderlands were at the titular border of the kingdom, the journey took much longer than the other one had.

"Mmnggh." As soon as I got out of the coach, I raised my arms above my head and stretched as far as I could. I heard all kinds of popping—I'd been stuck in the same position for *forever*.

"It's hard not to feel a bit tired after all this," Albert said as he stretched beside me, hands on his hips. He had been with me inside the coach, and I supposed even he wasn't accustomed to traveling this far, despite how often he went on expeditions.

"That's for sure. After this rest, we'll be heading straight for the capital of the domain, right?" I asked.

"Indeed. You must be tired. Go ahead and relax over there."

"Ah, thank you."

I looked where he was pointing to a spot behind him. I headed there to find a white sheet had been laid out on the ground, somewhat like a picnic blanket. On top of the sheet lay a light meal. There were also folding stools set up around it. The attendants traveling with us must have arranged it all in the short time between when we had stopped and when I had alighted from the coach.

We got ourselves seated and received cups of tea from the attendants. I thanked the attendant as I took mine and relished the cup's heat as it warmed the palm of my hand.

Hawke's Domain enjoyed a colder climate than the capital, and it was beginning to feel a bit chilly. I was therefore grateful for the warmth. I took a sip

and inhaled deeply.

As I looked around, I took in rocky mountains capped with snow. They reminded me of the Japanese Alps, and we seemed to be pretty high above sea level.

“This is really doing the trick,” Albert said nonchalantly as he similarly used the tea to warm his fingers.

“For me too,” I agreed as I took another sip.

“It’s so cold here because the land is a bit elevated.”

“This whole region is pretty mountainous, right?”

“Indeed it is. I’m surprised you know.”

“I read up on the region a bit before we left. It’s important to do preliminary investigations.”

The majority of Hawke’s Domain was mountainous, and the average temperature was colder than the capital’s all year round. The second largest lake in all of Salutania was also located there. I had heard the lakeside was a famous tourist attraction as well.

I had learned all this from the classes I took at the palace. Similarly, I had learned other important information for our expedition, such as the typical strength of the local monsters.

In this kingdom, the monsters got stronger the farther away from the capital they manifested. Therefore, since the Hawke Borderlands were farthest away, the monsters in this domain were of the strongest variety. That was the reason why the Third Order had been deployed for this expedition, as they were the Order with the most monster-slaying experience.

In addition to that, the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly had accompanied us. It wasn’t just because he had thrown a tantrum like he had with the rice business either. The king had ordered him to come along.

Based on the surplus of firepower we were packing, I had an idea of just how hard they were expecting this expedition to be.

“We should get a move on again,” Albert said just as I finished drinking my

tea.

“Yes, sir.”

Everyone around us started packing up.

Two more hours of coach travel later, we arrived at our destination.

The capital city of Hawke’s Domain was surrounded by ramparts, just as the one in Klausner’s Domain. A moat circling the walls was drawn from the river. Also, while the capital city of Klausner’s Domain was on a hill, this one was built on level ground.

Seen from the direction we were traveling in, the city butted up against the left side of the highway, and at the leftmost point from the road, I saw a castle. Both the castle and the buildings sported dark blue rooftops, which gave the city a serene air.

I didn’t notice until we had entered the city, but while the land appeared flat, there was actually some difference in elevation. The castle was built at the highest point, and there was a bit of an upward slope before you could reach it.

I had assumed that the castle would be a single building, but it was actually composed of multiple structures. A series of three-and four-storied buildings acted as a wall. According to Albert, his family lived in one of these buildings.

The coach came to a stop in the courtyard past the castle gates. Just as I had been informed they would be, Lord Hawke and a multitude of his people were waiting for us in front of a building with a grand entrance. I assumed that made this Lord Hawke’s estate.

The man awaiting us was in the prime of life; I assumed he was Lord Hawke and that the woman beside him must be his wife, and that the rest were their servants. The lord and lady were front and center while their attendants stood in a line behind them.

I had seen this sight enough times that it made me start to wonder if there was some sort of nobility mold out of which they had all been cast.

I got out of the coach with Albert’s aid, and when I looked up, I met the eyes

of the man I assumed to be the lord. A gentle smile immediately crossed his face.

I was guided toward the lord and lady and stopped at an appropriate spot. At that point, the man said, “Thank you, truly, for coming such a great distance. It is an honor to make your acquaintance. I am the lord of this domain, Helmut Hawke.”

“And I am Claudia, his wife.”

It was all going just as I had imagined it would. I was greeted by Albert’s parents, the Marquis and Marquess of the Hawke Borderlands. Lord Hawke had blond hair and blue-gray eyes, just as Albert did. His hair was a darker shade than Albert’s, and overall he more closely resembled Albert’s older brother, the minister of military services.

Lady Hawke had silver hair that fell in gentle waves and light purple eyes. She had a kind air about her. The light gave her hair a pale-blue sheen, so perhaps it wasn’t accurate to call it strictly silver.

Now I could see how all three brothers resembled their parents in one way or another. The minister of military services looked just like his father, while Lord Smarty-Glasses had the looks and eye color of his father but the hair color of his mother, and Albert had the colors of his father but the looks of his mother.

Even though I was momentarily absorbed in these thoughts, I didn’t forget to properly respond.

“How do you do? I’m Sei Takanashi.” Just as Lady Hawke did, I pinched the skirt of my robes and curtsied.

Albert and the grand magus performed their greetings as well. At first, Albert greeted his parents formally, perhaps because he was in work mode. But that was indeed only at first.

“Welcome home,” said the marquis.

Albert smiled slightly and murmured, “Yes. I’m home.”

“You all must be tired after such a long journey. We shall show you to your rooms, so please feel free to take your leisure until dinner.”

“Thank you.”

They didn’t prolong the conversation and immediately guided us to our quarters out of concern for our well-being. Although we had taken breaks along the way, I was grateful for this. I had used Healing Magic on myself to ease the pain from sitting in the same position for hours on end and the fatigue, but still!

While the butlers showed everyone else to their rooms, I was led away by Lady Hawke.

Whenever I arrived at a place, things happened in basically the same order. It depended on the time of our arrival, and on my level of exhaustion, but typically, on the night of my arrival, I had dinner with the lord’s family. Things were no different in Hawke’s Domain.

While the lady escorted me to my rooms, she invited me to dinner. At the appointed time, five of us gathered in the dining room: the lord and lady of the house, Albert, Yuri, and me. As soon as we were all present, Lord Hawke gave the signal for the meal to begin.

We were served meals made using ingredients for which Hawke’s Domain was known. Hearing mention of specialty products reminded me of the party I had hosted, but the dishes we were served weren’t based on what I’d featured then. It wasn’t food seasoned with herbs either, which were all the rage in the capital these days. It was the food they had always eaten in this domain.

“There’s so much cheese,” I said as I took a bite of one of the numerous cheese-forward dishes.

“Indeed. Our domain thrives on producing fine cheeses, so we produce all manner of varieties,” Lady Hawke explained with a bright smile.

Each dish used a different kind of cheese, and all of it had been made here in Hawke’s Domain.

“This white wine goes down so smoothly,” I said. “It’s delicious in its own right, *and* it pairs beautifully with every dish you’re serving.”

“Thank you so much for saying so. The wine was also made here on our

lands.”

I’d known that Hawke’s Domain was famous for its artisanal cheeses, but I hadn’t known they made wine as well. Perhaps that was why Hawke’s Domain had a very particular kind of dish.

By that I meant cheese fondue. Albert had mentioned it to me once before. A fondue was made of a ton of cheeses melted into a heated white wine. In Hawke’s Domain, it was typical to eat it by spreading it on bread, but it also tasted delicious with boiled vegetables, cooked bacon, and other foods. However, it wasn’t the type of dish one served at a dinner hosted at the table of nobility, so we weren’t enjoying it at that meal. Rather, it was available in restaurants in the city.

In addition to cheese fondue, the domain also had dishes like raclette and gratin. I hoped to try them while we were in the borderlands, but I supposed it might be difficult as we’d be busy monster slaying. Alas.

Ever since we sat down for dinner, Lady Hawke had been the one doing most of the talking. Lord Hawke and Albert made occasional comments, and even Yuri just offered short remarks. Only the voices of we women echoed through the dining room.

Maybe the men in House Hawke were the stoic type? Although that didn’t seem to be the case based on Albert and Lord Smarty-Glasses’ usual behavior. Maybe they thought that I’d have an easier time talking with another woman and so were just being quiet.

As Lady Hawke and I were happily discussing Hawke’s Domain, she said something that I couldn’t just gloss over.

“Huh?! You have hot springs here?” I exclaimed.

“So we do. At the lake to the north of our city, hot water springs forth by the riverbank.”

There were actually hot springs here?! How could I not get excited? I had always adored hot springs, especially back when I lived in Japan.

The truth, though, was that I could count the number of times I’d ever been to a hot spring in my life on one hand. I had probably only ever gone during

family vacations. Once I started working, I'd rarely had a day off, and I'd always spent those days catching up on housework. So to me, hot springs had remained an unattainable dream.

No one had mentioned hot springs since my summoning, so I had assumed there weren't any to be had. But now I knew otherwise.

In this world and this life, in which I had so much more free time...maybe I could go? I had a feeling that was the case. The only roadblock was that I was kind of sort of in the middle of a job.

Once we're done, perhaps we could take a bit of time to go? Maybe I should ask Albert in private later.

"Are you interested in hot springs, Lady Takanashi?" asked Lady Hawke.

"I am. We have them in my birthplace as well, but I never really had a chance to go. It would be nice if I could enjoy one again someday."

"Is that so? We have a villa in the town where the hot springs are located. You're most welcome to visit there, if you would like," Lord Hawke proposed.

I snapped out of my hot springs daze. "Are you sure?"

"Of course."

My eyes must have sparkled, because Albert immediately promised we could go after we finished the expedition—another proposal that filled me with joy.

Naturally, I gave my enthusiastic assent to this plan. Knowing I would have such a reward once we were done fired me up. I was going to put my all into this expedition.

According to Albert, although the town had hot springs, it hadn't been turned into a tourist attraction. The main visitors to the springs were citizens of Hawke's Domain and the soldiers in House Hawke's employ—as well as mercenaries, who used them to heal their fatigue after going monster slaying.

In other words, it wasn't an extravagant facility for noble use, nor were there shops with expensive baubles on sale, nor restaurants with fancy food. No trendy cafés either. Even so, I was more than content with the mere idea of being able to soak in a hot spring and relax.

However, I did feel like it was kind of a loss. Hot springs were rare in this country. That much was clear from the fact that I had never heard anyone mention them.

Maybe if they developed the area and advertised it, a lot of people would come sightseeing? Especially if they had one of those kinds of establishments...

It was probably because those thoughts were going through my mind as I listened to Albert speak that I accidentally uttered, "Massage parlors..."

"Massage parlors?" Albert looked confused, likely because he had never heard the term before.

Crap, I thought as I tried to smooth things over. "Oh, uh, you mentioned that the knights use the hot springs too, right?"

"So I did."

"Getting a massage after warming your body in a hot spring is a great way to relieve exhaustion! That's why I was thinking it would be nice if there were a place to get a massage after bathing in them."

Albert had just been telling his father that he would like to let his knights use the hot springs while we were here as well, so I tried to connect the dots. I trailed off at the end, but they seemed to follow where I was going.

Lady Hawke wasn't about to let the topic end there, though. "Is that the only benefit?"

"Uh, I don't know? Oh! It might also be good for chronic health conditions?"

"What do you mean?" Lady Hawke was smiling, but something in her look scared me.

I braved it to reply, "Ah, like with motor dysfunction. Soaking in hot springs is said to help alleviate symptoms such as not being able to move your hands and feet so well after an injury."

I really did my best to hang on. I had a feeling that I knew what would happen if I mentioned it was said to have beautifying effects as well. This was why I segued to injuries instead, which the knights were likely all dealing with.

This caught not only Albert's interest but his father's. They both employed a

number of soldiers. Injuries were an unavoidable part of the monster-slaying profession.

After that, I started describing how massages helped to loosen muscles and how they would likely be even more effective with essential oils.

I was surprised to see Yuri take an interest in the latter part. He asked me all kinds of questions about oils. By the time he asked me if massages and essential oils could increase his magical abilities, I understood where he was coming from. He had landed on that notion when he heard that massages could help increase blood flow.

Did blood and magic have some kind of connection? I would have to ask him later, when I got the chance.

Incidentally, Lady Hawke grilled me for details too. She wanted to know if a massage after a dip in the hot springs might have promise as a beauty treatment.

The essential oils used for massages were also used in beauty products, so it was easy enough to make that connection. There was no way that Lady Hawke, a fearless fighter on the battlefield that was high society, could have missed that fact.

This time I was unable to grit my teeth and deny the look of hope she shot my way. I folded and told her I would make time to explain it all in detail once we were done with the expedition.

After that, the dinner continued with an amiable atmosphere as our hosts regaled us with more tales of Hawke's Domain.

The day after the dinner party, Lord Hawke spoke with me about the expedition. The monster population had been increasing in the vicinity of a certain mine. It was located in a different direction from the hot springs and it was far from the capital, so it would take us a few days to get there.

Nearby, we would find a settlement where the miners and guards lodged. This settlement was much smaller than the domain's capital. Apparently, it consisted of only the building where the miners lived, the living quarters of the

person who managed the miners, and an eating hall for everyone to gather. It was an inconvenient dwelling for any length of time, but if it had a place to sleep, it was sufficient for their needs.

There was a reason why the miners lived in these kinds of settlements: Since the mines were in the mountains and there were a ton of monsters in the area, it was difficult for anyone but miners to live there permanently, as anyone who did would have to know how to deal with monsters. Because of this, the miners' families lived in a village a short distance from the settlement. Simply put, the miners were working away from their loved ones.

The village was located in the flatlands and so didn't have to worry much about monsters. It had shops that sold everything you might need to live; there was even an entertainment district. As such, the miners returned home to their families on their days off.

I spent several days leisurely jostling in the coach from the capital until we arrived at our destination.

The mining settlement was surrounded by walls of wood and stone. Just as I had been told, it was composed of only the bare minimum number of buildings that the miners required. It did have a small plaza for the soldiers who were there to slay monsters, as well as for guards. We decided to put up camping tents in this plaza for our own needs.

As the knights set up the tents, Albert, Yuri, and I went to talk to the warden of the settlement. The warden was clearly unaccustomed to dealing with important people such as us, but he did his best to convey the current state of affairs.

Sure enough, monsters had been manifesting in great numbers. But recently, the monsters had begun to take on new forms.

"New forms, you say?"

"Y-yes, my lord. All the monsters we had seen up until now were, well, alive."

Alive? A certain concept sprang to mind at that wording. I wasn't the only one to think it, either.

Albert asked the warden to explain himself, and the man timidly answered,

“They’re, um, *not* alive.”

“Not alive.”

“Yes...”

“Are you implying that they were animated corpses?”

The warden hesitated before he finally answered, “Yes.”

This made me frown. *I know this kind of monster. That’s gotta be it.*

I was sure of it.

The warden had never heard of such a creature before, so when people had reported their existence, he had been dubious. That was why he had been so nervous while telling us about them himself.

On the other hand, after having fought monsters all over the country, Albert and Yuri knew of the existence of such entities—hence why they were so calm as they discussed it.

“They must be undead,” Albert said.

“So it seems,” Yuri agreed.

When I discussed holy water with Yuri once before, he had mentioned undead as well, so I’d confirmed their existence in this world. That didn’t mean I actually wanted to meet any. As for what bothered me about them, it came down to the way they looked. In games back in Japan, there had been undead who didn’t look so grotesque, but there had also been the kind that did.

According to Yuri, both varieties could be found in this world. Since the warden had clearly said these monsters weren’t alive, it was highly likely that it was easy to tell that they weren’t from, you know, visual details. In other words, the kind of undead appearing near the settlement were the hideous sort.

That brought us to the next problem we’d inevitably face: the odor. I had never smelled a corpse before, so I could only imagine, but I was sure it wasn’t going to be pleasant.

As Albert and Yuri spoke, they gave each other a look. I had a feeling it wasn’t

just because they were worried about aromas.

“Were they only sighted inside the mine? Or outside as well?” Yuri asked the warden.

“There were more of them in the mine, but I hear that they’ve been spotted in the area nearby as well.”

“I see.” Yuri put a thoughtful hand to his chin.

“Is something wrong?” I asked out of curiosity.

“I was just mulling over what kind of magic to use to defeat them.”

Why’s he worried about that? Although, didn’t he once say that no kind of magic is especially effective against undead monsters?

I asked him for more information, and it sounded like he was wondering if he could cast Fire Magic. That made sense. While Yuri could call on every type of magic, he was particularly proficient with flames.

It seemed I wasn’t wrong, because he then uttered, “It’d probably be more efficient if I took them down with fire spells.”

The way he said it made me remember just how many people spoke of Yuri and his love for the thrill of battle.

After speaking with the warden, we headed back to the tents.

The knights planned to do as they always did: split into a few squads, thoroughly explore the territory, and then decide their next course of action. That was the long and short of it.

I was sure that Yuri and I would be doing something else while still calling it investigating. To wit, as per usual, Yuri was going to go mop up the monsters in the vicinity to level up as much as possible. I would do what I usually did too: investigate the local herbs—while looking out for monsters too, of course.

I got Albert’s permission just in case, at which he just laughed and said he couldn’t exactly ask me to change my ways.

I’m sorry!

Starting the next day, we began scouting the area. Just as the proverb says: So many countries, so many customs. Here and there, I spotted herbs that weren't native to the regions near the capital. There were even herbs that I had only seen in illustrated reference books, which got me *really* excited. Buoyed by that excitement, I picked them carefully.

"Is that an herb as well?" Albert asked as I looked closely at the plant I had just picked.

"Actually, I don't know."

"You don't?"

"I've never seen this kind of grass before. I decided to pick it just in case it actually does qualify as an herb."

Perhaps it had some kind of medicinal effect. I was planning to keep it as a specimen to look up when we got back to the capital. It made me wish I could use Appraisal Magic, though. If I could do that, then I could decide right then and there whether to keep it. Unfortunately, I wasn't so blessed, so all I could do was study it the normal way.

Oh, but I suppose I could ask the grand magus to cast it for me later? He is here with us, after all. I might as well.

Just as I was putting the herb in my backpack, Albert suddenly said my name in a quiet voice, "Sei."

"Yes?"

The knights grew tense as well.

A moment later, a monster that looked like a boar appeared in the distance where Albert was pointing. At the signal of the knights taking the lead, they all charged it simultaneously. They cut it down swiftly, but as it turned out, we hadn't noticed that the monster wasn't alone. The battle erupted.

Nevertheless, all the knights were highly experienced on the battlefield. They focused and took down the monsters one after another. Before I knew it, the fight was over, and none of our allies had even taken any injuries.

"There really are a lot of them."

We had expected as much, but there were a cosmic *ton* of the monsters, and they appeared with great frequency to boot.

“No kidding—and even with Sei here,” another knight agreed.

He didn’t need to mention it!

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I couldn’t help but squint and glare.

The knight suppressed his laughter as he apologized.

Hmph!

Albert was laughing too, but after a moment, his expression grew serious.

“Considering the number of monsters, it’s likely we’ll find their source.”

“Yeah...”

The knights’ expressions once more grew tense. Even though no one said it, we were all thinking the same thing: Somewhere around here, we would no doubt find a black swamp.

Act 6:

The Undying Monsters

DURING THE INVESTIGATION, we did indeed locate a black swamp, deep in the mines. The miners had reported that more undead appeared inside than outside of the mines, so we had predicted as much.

The day after its discovery, we immediately headed in to purge it.

“Light.” A mage cast a Practical Magic spell, summoning a faintly glowing ball of light to float in the air and illuminate the area around us.

Everyone in this world could use Practical Magic, but it cost MP, same as any spell. Ordinary people didn’t have much MP at their disposal, so normally they relied on thoroughly unmagical lamps and lanterns. The miners also largely employed ordinary lanterns for light within the mines. However, since it was quite likely that the lanterns would be destroyed on these expeditions, our people with MP to spare lit the way with the Light spell, as they were doing now.

As the surrounding area grew brighter, I heard some kind of flapping from deeper within the mines. Gradually, we started to see monsters that looked like bats. I’d assumed we’d run into them, since this was a mine and all, and it turned out I’d been right again.

I immediately cast a spell to buff everyone, and the knights went on ahead. They worked together to swiftly take out the bats. Once the fight was over, we continued making our way into the mines.

Bats weren’t the only sort of monsters we ran into. There were also beasts that resembled wolves and lizards. However, most of them weren’t the typical variety but a kind covered in rocks. A lot of them had attributes of the earth element, hence their location in the mines.

The farther we went, the more monsters we ran across, most likely because we were approaching the black swamp. The mines weren’t open like the forest, so it felt like they were all clustered close together. On the flip side, since the

monsters had a limited number of directions from which to approach, the fights were overall a bit easier for us.

In addition, since the mine's walls were made of dirt and rock, we didn't have to worry about burning down the environment, which meant that Yuri was actively participating in our battles. He cast fire spells one after the other, allowing us to proceed at a smooth pace.

Of course, when we encountered any monsters that were earth types, he would make full use of wind spells instead, since they were especially vulnerable to that element. I assumed he whipped out the windy stuff mostly because it was more efficient. Given his druthers, he dealt with most of the monsters using flames, flames, and more flames.

After we advanced a little farther, a different sort of monster began to appear. We had already seen a few undead along the way. They were recognizably animals, but parts of their bodies were visibly rotting. And, just as I had feared, the stench was awful. The first time we ran into one, I reflexively threw up.

From then on, I tried my best not to breathe while we fought the undead. Even so, I had my limits. It was hard to keep fighting while holding my breath, so eventually, I wound up covering my mouth with a piece of cloth. It helped, but it didn't eliminate much of the overall effect.

It might be a good idea to develop something like an odor-resistant mask the next time we have to go fight nasty-smelling monsters, I thought. I had a feeling such a thing had existed in the world of my origin, but I had no knowledge of the principles underlying its design. It was completely out of my area of expertise, so I didn't even know where to begin. *I might have to reinvent it from scratch. If I consult people about it, maybe there'll be someone out there in this world who can make them?*

While I was still thinking about odor-resistant masks, we finally made it to the black swamp. Just as it had been reported, the swamp itself wasn't that large. However, undead monsters shambled out of it one after another.

For some reason, the stench was beyond awful, even with the cloth covering my face. I wanted to get this over with as soon as possible just to give my nose

some relief.

While I was impatient, we couldn't charge in straight away. There were several monsters around the perimeter of the swamp, so we knew we were in for a series of battles. It was standard practice to stop at this moment and prepare ourselves first. We chose a spot where the monsters near the swamp couldn't see us.

"Let's stay here a moment and recast our spells. Keep an eye on your reserves of HP and MP," Albert commanded.

"Yes, sir," everyone answered.

"All right, I'm going to cast my spells now," I called. *"Area Heal. Area Protection."*

Everyone drank potions to recover their HP and MP and I recast our buff. It felt like everyone was preparing to take on a boss in a video game.

"Thank you!" several voices called to me.

Just when I thought we were finally ready to go, Yuri put a hand to his chin and said, "Excuse me, but might I try an experiment first?"

"An experiment?"

"Yes. I would like to see if I myself can purge the black swamp."

I suspected Yuri had been wondering about this ever since we spoke about it during the dish unveiling at the institute.

When the density of miasma grew to a certain level, it affected the monsters near to it, and the palace had begun to hypothesize that black swamps themselves were merely an especially dense concentration of miasma. So, Yuri had been wondering whether it might be possible to purge the swamps without relying on the Saint's magic—just like he exterminated ordinary monsters. This was why he wanted to try using his own Holy Magic to purify it.

"I might not be able to purge it, but I want to see if I can manage to affect it in some way."

"And you want to try Holy Magic because it's close to the Saint's power?"

“That’s part of it.”

Specifically, Yuri wanted to develop and test a spell to eliminate black swamps, but unfortunately, he hadn’t yet met with any success. So, the next best thing would be assessing whether Holy Magic made any impact on its own.

Albert frowned after hearing Yuri’s brief explanation. “So you only came along to experiment?”

“Exactly. This swamp isn’t that big, so I thought it would be a suitable subject.”

“But just look at the number of monsters. Everyone but you would be at their limit trying to take them all out.”

Albert and Yuri were of the same rank, but Albert was the one leading our team. Of course he couldn’t roll over just because Yuri wanted to try something out. Without the grand magus fighting by their side, the rest of the party would have a much tougher time dealing with the monsters until I was able to finish casting the Saint’s magic. The previous black swamps had also ended in grueling battles. Surely Yuri knew that.

But he wasn’t about to give up so easily. “There is *value* in this work. If Holy Magic can purge this swamp, it will mean that people other than Lady Sei can deal with future irruptions.”

“Well.” Albert hesitated. “You’re right that it would be a boon to have more than one person able to purify these swamps, but—”

“Just once, then. For my first spell. Please.”

Albert was quiet for a long moment before he finally sighed. “Fine. Give it a shot. But only your very first spell.”

“Thank you!”

Albert gave in with visible reluctance. Although this would endanger their tactical approach, perhaps he thought it might have a greater strategic effect to open with Holy Magic. I offered an opinion along those lines, but we still had no idea if it would work.

Once we were done speaking, at the grand magus’s signal, the battle began.

“Here I go. *Holy Arrow*.”

I turned in his direction, surprised. I had never heard nor read of a spell with that name. The other mages in the party looked just as shocked as me, which made me realize that this was a brand-new spell. Although Yuri had as yet been unable to devise a spell that could purge the black swamps, he had finished devising a new Holy Magic spell—and an offensive one at that. New spells took a long time to properly develop. The grand magus truly was something else.

Yuri shot his Holy Arrow straight into the swamp, where it was absorbed. There was no visible change, but Yuri and his vast knowledge of magic seemed to detect a promising change. “It looks like it had an effect—very small, but there. Well, that nugget was worth the effort. Lady Sei, I leave the rest to you.”

“Okay!”

I didn’t have time to grill Yuri for more details. The monsters knew we were here, and they simultaneously lumbered toward us. As the knights did their damndest to defeat the monsters, the mages at the rear attacked the creatures with spells.

As per our usual teamwork, while everyone else took care of the monsters, I started to summon the Saint’s magic. I had done this so many times that, by now, I had grown pretty used to it. That didn’t mean I didn’t still feel, ah, *embarrassed* as I called on it.

I concentrated, feeling my cheeks grow hot as I did. Magic began to flow forth from my chest. I let it flow and flow as I continued to let my magic flood outward.

As I watched, the golden mist enveloped the black swamp—and then I unleashed my power.

Everything went white. A few moments later, my vision returned, and I saw sparkling golden particles flutter down from the ceiling.

“It looks like it’s been purged.”

“Reliable as ever. Good job.”

Along with the black swamp, the monsters had been completely eradicated.

Not a single one remained, and the spot where there had once been a black swamp looked exactly the same as the path we had taken to reach it.

I responded to Albert's words of thanks, and now all that was left to do was to take a moment to recover ourselves and head back. However...

"What?! Why?" I couldn't help but cry out as we were ambushed by another undead monster.

Usually, when I purged a black swamp, all the monsters in the area were likewise purged. As such, we didn't typically run into any on our way back. That wasn't to say that we *never* ran into more such creatures on our way home, as a short time after purifying a swamp, the monsters would start spawning again. However, they would manifest at the same frequency as they had before the formation of the black swamp.

In other words, the area would revert to the state it had been in before the manifestation of that swamp—which was why I had assumed the same would hold true in the mines as well.

The other reason I was so shocked to see an undead was because it was my understanding that no one had ever spotted one without a black swamp somewhere in the vicinity. Although we went ahead and defeated the creature, I couldn't shake the anxiety. This *bothered* me.

"Undead monsters aren't typical to this area, are they?" Yuri asked Albert. It seemed I wasn't the only one who thought this strange.

Albert wore an enduring frown as he answered, "Indeed, they aren't. I'm fairly sure the warden reported that they usually only ever encounter earth elemental beasts."

Did this mean that undead monsters would become the norm in this mine because there had once been a black swamp? Surely not—right?

We'd seen black swamps make monsters uncommon to the local environment spawn in strange places before. That said, once the black swamp was gone, those new monsters no longer manifested in those locations.

As this was unprecedented, anxiety began to spread throughout the party.

“What if there’s some other cause?” I suggested offhandedly.

“What do you mean?”

I had just rattled off that possibility, but it seemed it might not be totally off base. *And the first and foremost other potential cause would be—*

“When you consider it, perhaps this indicates that there is another black swamp somewhere on the premises?” Yuri suggested.

We had come to the same conclusion.

“That does seem to be the most likely possibility.” Albert paused. “However, we thoroughly searched this mine, and no one reported seeing a second swamp.”

“Ah.”

What if it was outside, then? We all pondered this for a bit, but in the end, we couldn’t come up with a definitive answer. We also knew it would be for the best if we left the mine before deciding on our next course of action. After all, if we stood around thinking all day, we risked suffering another attack.

Ultimately, we decided to discuss this at the settlement and started making our way back to the entrance to the mine. As we went, we defeated monsters that we ran into along the way.

That was when something felt off in my shoe. I had probably gotten a pebble inside it. I tried to suck it up until we got out, but every time I stepped on my foot, it stung, and it was really starting to bother me.

Hmm, I guess after this next fight, I’ll take my shoe off as fast as I can and dump the pebble out.

I made a face as I thought this, which prompted Albert to ask, “Are you all right?”

“Oh, yeah, it’s just that something got into my shoe.”

“Oh, and that’s bothering you? You should remove it as fast as possible.”

I felt dreadful making everyone stop for such a personal and insignificant

problem, but I was about at my limit. I decided to take Albert up on his offer. I apologized to everyone and put my hand on the wall for support while I took off my shoe.

Then I heard some terrible sound. Then I was falling over.

“Huh?!”

“Sei!”

My head snapped in the direction of the wall to find that the wooden board that had been nailed to it had fallen and behind it was a gaping hole. Having lost my balance, I fell down into its darkness.

On the other side of the hole was a steep downward slope.

“Owww.”

I wasn't sure how far I had tumbled on the way down. I sat up at the spot where I had finally stopped. I was sure my eyes were open, but it was pitch-black as far as I could see, with no light to be found. The same went for sound—nothing. It was so painfully silent that I started to fear that something had happened to both my eyes and my ears.

Although I doubted that was the case, since neither of them actually hurt.

Oh yeah, I'm pretty sure I heard Albert's voice right before I fell. He had to have seen me fall. I knew he was profoundly worried. He'd likely come looking for me right away. *Should I call out for him to let him know where I am?*

I took a breath to shout, but then I stopped. *I got rid of the swamp, but there's still strange monsters around. I doubt there are any around me now, but what will I do if monsters come after me because they hear my voice? Can I defeat them by myself?*

I decided against calling out. Although I could use Saintly powers that were effective against monsters, I wasn't confident that I could use that power while resisting attacks. And although I had the highest base level in the kingdom, I doubted I could defeat anything in hand-to-hand combat. All of that meant that shouting was not my brightest idea.

What should I do, then?

My thoughts were interrupted by pain radiating all through my body. At first only the parts of my body that had been knocked about during my tumble were throbbing, but now that I had recovered from the initial shock, I was noticing places on my body that oozed with pain.

I was doubtless covered in scrapes from the fall. I tried to check myself to see how bad it was, but in the darkness, I couldn't see myself at all.

Maybe I should make some light? But I was afraid that might attract the attention of monsters too. That being said, it also didn't feel right to cower in the dark and neglect my injuries either.

If a monster did attack me, it would be much harder to deal with than it would normally be. If anything, I would have a much higher chance of survival if I called up one spell to allow myself to see and another to cure my wounds.

Speaking of, healing myself with magic made me glow. Well, if I was going to potentially attract the attention of something out there, then it would be best if I could properly see as well.

Having come to that conclusion, I decided to give myself some light.

I don't have a lantern, though. I guess I'll have to use the Practical Magic spell.

I usually relied on lanterns or lamps, but I had used Light on a few occasions, so I knew I could cast it without a problem.

Oh yeah. The grand magus told me that, if I wanted to, it's possible to make the light not as bright when I cast the spell. Perhaps if I do that, it won't be so easily noticed. Okay, I'll give it a try.

"Light."

A small orb of light floated up into the air. It gave off much less illumination than the one the mage had conjured at the entrance to the mine. Nevertheless, it was more than enough for me to give myself a once over.

As I looked down at myself, I accidentally let a groan slip. My clothes were covered in dirt and dust, and they were torn in several places. And of course, the places where my clothes were torn were where I had the biggest scratches.

It felt like it stung even more just looking at myself. Though my skin looked fine now, I had a feeling that I would be covered in bruises before long.

I should heal myself right away.

“Heal.” I cast the spell on myself, making my whole body glow white. As usual, golden particles danced about in the light.

Once the illumination subsided, my injuries had been nicely healed and the pain was gone too. I heaved a sigh of relief—goodbye, discomfort!—before I took another look around.

I was at a T-junction. There were paths in front of me, as well as behind and to my left. The paths ahead and behind were thin and flat, but the one to my left went up a steep slope.

When I considered my present situation, it was likely that I had tumbled down here from the path on the left. I didn’t remember much about it—I had been too confused. But from the fact that I couldn’t see any light as I peered up the slope, it seemed like a winding path.

So, what was I to do?

I had no doubt that it would be better to go back the way I had come instead of trying to do something on my own. Alas, it turned out that was the wrong idea.

I tried to go up the left path, but because it abruptly steepened, I stopped being able to climb it. I might have been able to manage it if there had been protrusions on the wall to hold onto, but unfortunately, I saw no such thing.

This situation isn’t going to get any better if I just stand around staring up at it. I guess I should head back. If I run into monsters here, I’ll have nowhere to run.

I heaved a depressed sigh as I headed back to the T-junction.

Now what? I had a feeling that it wouldn’t be a good idea to move far from this spot and make my way down one of the paths.

I studied the place where I had fallen.

My companions have surely figured out what happened. They’ll come looking

for me. If I move from this spot, they won't know where I've gone, I thought as I sat down against the wall and hugged my legs.

How long would it take them to find me? In my satchel, I had potions, a simple first aid kit, and food and water, so I would be able to last for a little while. Thankfully, the potion bottles and the canteen were undamaged, so I could still use them. But what if it took days?

I tried to remember what I ought to do in this kind of situation. However, because it was so dark and because I was alone, whenever I lost focus, my mind began to trend toward dark thoughts.

This wasn't good.

I shook my head back and forth to drive the bad thoughts away. Even though I tried, it felt like the more I tried *not* to think, the further the dark thoughts crept into my mind.

Hmm, maybe it would be best to think about what we'll do after this expedition instead?

"That's right, think about something else," I said aloud to bolster myself.

I started with imagining what would happen after we returned to the capital. I'd return to the experiments I had been performing before I left for this expedition, and I'd have to work on helping to prepare and open the restaurants and cafés that had contracts to serve the food debuted at my party.

Ahh, and I can't forget the potions I have to make for the First Order.

At that thought, I involuntarily sighed. After our expedition together, the First Order had submitted an order for potions from the institute. Potion brewing made for a good diversion when I was stuck on something, and they hadn't ordered much, so it wasn't really a problem. That said, I was a bit reluctant when it came to the prospect of going to their barracks—I didn't know if I could take another round of that behavior.

It wasn't like they were still treating me like they had before—quite the opposite, actually. They must have realized I didn't really love the pampering, so they no longer treated me like royalty. Instead, they had taken up an appropriate sense of distance.

Yet all the same, something about it made me feel uncomfortable. Like whenever I was talking to them, I just got super antsy and was filled with the urge to run away. I wasn't sure why exactly I felt that way, but because I did, I really dreaded going to their barracks. Why was I like this about those knights when I was okay with Albert?

Although, on occasion, when he teased me I'd get a similar antsy feeling and *also* feel like I wanted to run away. Except those feelings didn't last long, and I certainly didn't ever feel like I wanted to avoid him.

"I wonder why that is..."

Fine, I knew the answer: It was because I had feelings for him. A ton of them. To the point that I thought it was probably more apt to say that...I had fallen in love with him.

I couldn't be sure, though. I had zero experience with relationships. And these feelings weren't as intense as the ones I had read about in books or seen in movies back in Japan. My heart didn't feel like it was being twisted into a knot whenever I was with him, nor did I feel restless all the time, nor was he on my mind all day, every day. Although I enjoyed the time I spent with him, those times only felt a *bit* different versus when I spent time with others.

Oh, but...

"Sei!"

Huh? Am I hearing things? Was it because I was thinking about Albert that I'd thought I heard his voice? My face was buried in my knees as I pulled myself out of my head and sluggishly looked up.

I scanned the area, but I saw nothing different. Above, perhaps? I slowly stood up to look up the path I had tumbled down—and just then, Albert came rushing toward me.

"Sei! Are you okay?"

"Lord Haw—"

Albert didn't give me a chance to finish. He immediately swept me into his arms.

At first, I didn't understand what was happening.

Albert quickly surveyed the area before checking to make sure I was in one piece. His grim expression melted into one of relief. Then he pulled me close again, and the next thing I knew, my upper body was enveloped in warmth.

It took me three full seconds to realize I was being hugged.

"Thank goodness," he murmured into my ear.

There's nothing good about this situation! Or maybe he's just glad I'm alive? I can't argue with that. All I could do was think, helpless to respond.

What was the matter with me?! I had heard that when people suffered too great a surprise, they became trapped in their own minds, but that didn't seem to be the case at present.

My mind had gone *blank*. I had no idea how to react. All I knew was that my face felt incandescently hot.

Uh, so, h-how do I respond to this? If he were just a regular friend, then I'd just lie back and enjoy the feeling of his taut muscles, right? No—wait a minute! What am I thinking?! Enjoy the feeling of his muscles?! Calm down, me! My mind whirled in confusion, with part of me desperately trying to escape from the reality of the situation.

Then I heard a voice from behind Albert say, "Did you find her?"

I instantly snapped back to myself, and Albert somewhat loosened his tight grip on me. I used the space he put between us to fan my steaming face with my hand.

I had probably only missed the feeling of his warmth because it was cold down here. Surely.

When Albert moved his arm, I saw people descending behind him.

"Oh, good. You're all right?" The voice I'd heard had been from Yuri, who looked unusually relieved.

"I'm sorry for worrying you."

I pretended not to notice the knights who were smirking behind Albert and

asked what had happened after I fell.

As it turned out, Albert had tried to throw himself right into the tunnel after me, but another knight had stopped him. That knight had realized what had happened and showed them that the tunnel behind the wooden board went down in a steep slope. He suggested that before descending, they should secure a way to return. Albert had lost his cool and objected at first, but he'd quickly come back to his senses. He agreed to the suggestion, and they'd come down here via a rope that we could use to get back. It had taken them some time to tie it securely, though.

"Although he seemed calm enough on the surface, we knew he was a bundle of worry underneath," added the knight who had stopped Albert from plunging in after me. He couldn't help ending his explanation with a small grin.

"Hey!" Albert desperately tried to stop him from saying anymore.

So much for changing the topic, I thought. But I tried anyway. "So, where exactly are we?"

The path that stretched on before and behind us was thinner than a typical tunnel, but given that it was so straight, I could tell that it wasn't a naturally formed passage.

"This is probably one of the tunnels that has fallen into disuse." But Albert didn't sound so sure.

"Oh, I see."

It was a guess based on his general knowledge about mines. In this world, just like my old one, you had to dig to find new veins of ore. For that reason, there were a number of standards one followed when digging through a mountain, but for one reason or another, there were always tunnels that fell into disuse. Those tunnels would be boarded up with wood to prevent people from wandering off.

Of course, they left signs on those boards to let people know that there were tunnels beyond. I didn't know if the wooden wall that had broken when I put my hand on it had included a warning sign, though.

Either way, based on its appearance, we could conclude that this tunnel had

been excavated a long time ago.

Perhaps it was because I had been reunited with everyone and felt safer, but I started peering around more closely.

“Something wrong?”

“Oh, no, I was just taking a closer look.”

If Albert hadn’t known about this place, I doubted anyone alive knew about it. Or maybe it was just that no one remembered that this tunnel existed? If someone had remembered, then the knights would have included it in their investigations alongside the other tunnels, then reported it to Albert.

Which meant that no one had yet explored this passage.

Maybe it was a coincidence, but as a Japanese person who’d played video games, part of me found it suspicious that we’d been running into undead monsters and then suddenly discovered an unexplored tunnel. Those were big old flags signaling an upcoming event if I’d ever seen them.

As a result, although I didn’t want to believe it could be true, I began to wonder if something was waiting for us at the end of this tunnel. It was because I had been staring toward the far end of the path that Albert had asked me if something was wrong.

“I doubt there’ll be anything, but part of me wants to check, just in case,” I admitted.

“But of course. It’s important to follow your intuition,” said Yuri, looking excited.

I tried to explain, but it was too late. Now Yuri wanted to see if there was anything to see.

Given the situation, Albert was at a loss. From the perspective of safety, it would be best for everyone to return, then have the knights come back to conduct another investigation. That was likely the plan as he had intended it.

He sank into thought with a serious look. I felt super guilty—after all, this was my fault.

“Based on how long it would take us to reach the exit, we can stay for another

two hours,” said Albert. “We *cannot* spend the night in here. We didn’t prepare for it.”

Yuri was thoughtful for a moment before he said, “This is true. Then let us explore for as long as time permits.”

I was a bit surprised. I’d thought Yuri would insist on exploring the whole tunnel right this instant.

It would be better to hurry, though, if we wanted to make it back to the entrance before sundown. Everyone seemed to be thinking the same thing. They immediately started coming up with a plan.

As they discussed, several knights went to scout ahead on both paths. When they got back, they reported that in one direction there was the most rancid stench.

Suspicious, no matter how you sliced it.

Albert and I exchanged a look and nodded.

“Shall we go in the direction of the odor, then?” Albert asked.

“Yes, it sounds like we’ll find something down that way,” Yuri agreed.

Everyone’s expression grew tense.

Thirty minutes of walking later, I grimaced. The smell had grown gradually worse until at last we arrived at the end of the path, which opened into a wide cavern.

There we found a black swamp much larger than the one we’d seen earlier. It covered the entire expanse of the cavern floor, and wave after wave of monsters spawned from it. Naturally, they were all undead.

Luckily, the tunnel opened up at a point considerably high on the wall of the cavern, so no monsters had yet noticed us. Even so, it was only a matter of time.

If I could, it would be best to purge it ASAP.

Having made up my mind, I tried to move to the front so I could see the entirety of the black swamp. However, for some reason, one of the knights

stopped me. I only had to wonder why for a moment.

“Look!” the knight whispered.

I looked where he was pointing to see the surface of the swamp bubbling.

“Oh my!”

They were small bubbles at first, but they gradually grew bigger and bigger.

At that moment, I was pulled back. Albert stepped into the position where I had been and stared at the swamp. “Is it a monster?” he murmured.

“It’s too big for that,” Yuri noted as he peered from behind Albert.

Simultaneously, their eyes widened in astonishment.

“It’s going to be a dragon,” said Albert. “Potentially an undead one.”

“This bodes ill.”

The surface of the swamp rippled, then an enormous beast with a very distinctive shape emerged from the bottom of the swamp.

It was indeed a dragon.

So...they actually existed in this world.

I had never seen one before, but they were said to be the strongest of all monsters. A chill ran down my spine.

Albert turned to give his command. “Retreat.”

“No, we should take care of the swamp, if possible,” Yuri said. “Now that it’s manifested, there’s no telling what damage it will cause if we let it run amok.”

“But—”

“We should attack it now, before it notices us. Attempting to face it at any later point would be foolhardy even for me.”

Albert clicked his tongue at Yuri’s argument, which was unusual for him.

“Lady Sei, can you purge it from your current position?” Yuri asked me.

“No—I can’t see the swamp from here.”

“Try to imagine where it is—imagine exactly. Then try.”

“But I can’t!”

“Ah, but I think you can. Your magic leaves you with a far greater degree of freedom than ours does.”

I made a strangled noise of distress.

“Besides, it will be too dangerous for you to expose yourself at the fore.”

“Huh?”

“We’ve already wasted too much time.” As soon as Yuri said this, we heard a loud boom and the earth shook beneath our feet.

Then there was a screeching like I’d never heard before. I reflexively covered my ears to block it out.

Huh? What’s going on?!

The knights in front of me stared down at the cavern floor, their expressions stiff.

“It knows we’re here,” said one of the knights at the front.

“Uhhh, Sei, please, you’ve got to try,” said another. “That—*thing* down there has a huge, gaping maw.”

“Is it an undead dragon?” I asked.

“You could say that.”

“It’s ramming itself into the wall below us. You’ve got to cast the spell *now*, before it destroys the wall.”

“Oh no!”

Their words made me go pale.

I rushed to take a deep breath and tried to focus on casting the spell, but I couldn’t concentrate. There was just too much shaking.

What should I do?

All the while, the great booms continued and the ground continued to tremble underfoot. Every time the earth tremored, dust sprinkled down from the ceiling, making me even more panicked.

I'd shut my eyes tightly closed, but then, suddenly, a warmth enveloped the hands that I had clasped to my breast. I opened my eyes to find a large hand wrapped around mine.

When I looked up, I found Albert smiling at me, the same way he always did. "It's all right. You can relax."

"That's right," Yuri immediately followed up. "We *are* here to protect you, so you needn't worry."

When I raised my eyes forward, I saw Yuri launch multiple high-level spells aimed downward. In front of him was a wall of earth that someone had conjured.

Beyond that, I saw the other knights, who'd taken up positions to protect me. They met my gaze and grinned.

"Thank you!" I called to them. "Here I go!"

To fail here would be to bring shame upon myself, I thought as I tried to psych myself up. It did the trick.

I summoned my focus again, and this time, my magic flowed unimpeded out from my chest. I suspected that it helped more than a little to have Albert holding my hands.

Perhaps it was because the air in the cavern was so heavy, but my magic crept out of the mouth of the tunnel and across the ground like the smoke of dry ice, then flowed down below into the cavern.

A moment later, the dragon let out a punishing roar.

"It doesn't seem that the magic will be quite enough to exterminate it. It's likely too large," Yuri said as he looked down at the undead dragon.

"But it does seem to be having *some* effect," a knight replied.

The weaker monsters were destroyed by mere contact with the golden magic, but the dragon wouldn't be so easily overcome. Yet it was enough to hurt it, even a little. I had the feeling that the dragon was panicking. The frequency of its earth-shaking attacks had increased.

This wasn't *enough*. I was sure we would win, so I felt okay, but we were still

only halfway there. I had to continue letting the magic flow. I had to flood the cavern.

As I concentrated, I strained myself to hear what everyone was saying. As I waited, listening, Yuri finally gave me the green light: “Lady Sei, finish the spell!”

By this point, the cavern was overflowing with my magic.

I was up against a dragon—an undead one, at that.

I poured even more of myself into the magic than I usually did, praying for everything within the cavern to be purified, and then unleashed the spell.

I squinted as the cavern was filled with dazzling light. At the same time, we heard the agonized shriek of what was, undoubtedly, the undead dragon’s final end.

Once the white light subsided, the ground no longer shook, and the dragon could be heard no more.

Afterword

HELLO, this is Yuka Tachibana.

Thank you so much for buying *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent*, Volume Seven.

Thanks to everyone's support, I somehow managed to deliver this volume to you. I am so grateful to everyone cheering me on all the time. Thank you so much. I feel like I'm always freaking out with every volume, but I always feel that the freak-out level is being pushed up (or pushed down?) each time. In any case, it's also thanks to the efforts of the people around me that I was able to bring this book to you, and for that I'm glad. Thank you all so much.

Editor W at Kadokawa Books: I'm so sorry for the great amount of trouble I caused you with this volume as well. I was somehow able to persist thanks to your eternal cheerful encouragement, even when I nearly joined the dark side while writing this book. Thank you. You're always such a big help when I need someone to help me think up ideas. Thank you so much to everyone else who was involved too. I'm sorry for all of the trouble I always cause you.

So, did you enjoy Volume Seven? I'll be mentioning some spoilers, so be sure to finish reading the novel before you read this.

There was a worldwide pandemic that started while I was working on Volume Six, and it still hadn't finished when I started working on this volume. How is everyone doing? Thanks to me doing the same as usual—staying cooped up at home and diligently washing my hands—I have managed to avoid catching the disease. In Volume Six, we had a panacea, but it'd be nice if we could easily get vaccines as soon as we wanted and they'd develop medicines so that everything could go back to normal already. I really want to travel again...

I wrote more about Ten'yuu's story in Volume Seven, though it's not because of the ongoing pandemic. I suddenly felt the urge to explain a lot of things, and it wound up being the longest Behind the Scenes chapter I'd ever written. This is a secret, but I was trembling with fear as I wrote it because it just never

seemed to end. How did I manage to come up with it all so easily? But maybe it's a good thing, since because of that, I was able to breathe life into a story line I had come up with but not used? There are other things I'd like to write about too, so I hope that someday, I'll get a chance to write about Zaidera again.

Speaking of things that won't end, that goes for the main story too. When publishing on the web, I aimed for 3,000 characters per chapter. However, I exceeded that several times with this volume. I'd start gradually freaking out when I got to 2,500 characters and realized the chapter wasn't anywhere near done, and then, when I was about to exceed the 3,000 mark, it would be like I had achieved enlightenment. Since the exact opposite was happening up through Volume Six, I think it might be because I was no longer commanding my brain to stop. And so, the chapter lengths of each chapter got a bit longer with Volume Seven.

Yasuyuki Syuri-sensei drew the illustrations for Volume Seven as well. Thank you again for such wonderful illustrations. The cover this time is a picture of Sei and Albert together, which there hasn't been for some time now. And they've got a good atmosphere between them too! I felt so happy when I saw Albert gazing so affectionately at Sei. And I was delighted to see the illustrations at the beginning where Sei has a slightly different hair style and completely different dress from usual. Sei! You're so cute, Sei. And we mustn't forget the delicious food. I remember feeling incredibly hungry as I checked the pictures, since I was just about to eat. I hope Syuri-sensei and I can go out to eat some delicious food again once everything's back to normal...

The manga version is doing very well too. I'm really thankful that so many people enjoy the story. I'm very grateful to everyone involved with the manga, starting with Fujiazuki-sensei—and everyone else who supported me as well, of course. Thank you for everything you do. The manga is just about to start the Klausner's Domain Arc. I think they've published up to where they've just arrived at the domain. There'll be lots of new characters, so I'm looking forward to seeing how Fuji-sensei draws them.

That reminds me—there was a deluxe version of Volume Five of the manga that came with a perfume inspired by Sei, and they'll be making another

perfume for Volume Six. This time, it will be for Albert! Some people were clamoring for a cologne, so I'm happy that we were able to deliver. We only just picked the scent the other day, but it'll be a fragrance that can be worn by both men and women. I think Kadokawa Books will make an announcement on their official site soon, so keep checking there for news if you're interested in getting it.

Between when Volume Six and Volume Seven came out, a spin-off manga called *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent: The Other Saint* began publication. Aira is the main character in this story, and it follows what she was going through during the main plot, which I haven't written about before. It's also about her life after she joined the Royal Magi Assembly. Aoagu-sensei is the artist for this manga. She's coming up with the story line herself, but I think it must have been a lot of work for her to devise from scratch, since she doesn't have anything in particular to reference aside from the original novel series. I feel much obliged to her every time I ask her to change something during my reviews of the plot and storyboard. I feel nothing but gratitude to Aoagu-sensei for taking on such a difficult job. And of course, thank-yous all around to everyone else involved with this manga. Thanks to the generous Aoagu-sensei and everyone who supported us, Volume One is going to be published. Thank you all so much.

Both the manga and the spin-off are selling well with great reviews. You can read them on webcomic publishing sites ComicWalker, pixiv Comic, and Nico Nico Seiga.* You can read some of the chapters for free, so please check them out if you're interested.

So, in Volume Six I announced that *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent* was getting an anime. It started airing as scheduled in April. Before it started, people were shocked at the impressive lineup of the production team when it was announced on the web and social media. We were able to get such an incredible team thanks to everyone's continuous support. Thank you so much.

Have you all gotten a chance to watch the anime? As of the time I'm writing this afterword, it hasn't actually aired yet, but I am so excited to know whether everyone enjoys it. Some parts were altered to make it more enjoyable as an anime, but the general concept is still the same as the original novels. It was

made to be a story that can help people decompress after a long day of work before they go to sleep, so I think everyone who enjoys the novels will enjoy the anime as well.

The anime is being broadcast on television and is available to watch on every type of streaming service, so I hope you'll watch it if you're interested.

We're nearing the end now. Thank you so much for reading thus far. The pandemic is still ongoing, so please, everyone, take care of yourselves. I'm going to strive to make sure not to get sick myself so that I can deliver Volume Eight to you. I hope we'll see each other again soon.

** Look for it in English, also from Seven Seas!*

Bonus Illustration

by Yasuyuki Syuri





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